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Vol. 203

Samuel Merwin

HENRY IS TWENTY

IN ONE VOLUME

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SAMUEL MERWIN

HENRY IS TWENTY

A Further Episodic History of Henry Calverly, 3rd

IN ONE VOLUME

BRUSSELS
WM. COLLINS SONS & CO. LTD.
LONDON AND GLASGOW
1921

OF PATTERNS AND PERSONS

It would be ungracious to let this book go out into a preoccupied world without some word of gratitude to those who have written regarding the young Henry as he has appeared from month to month in a magazine. The letters have been the kindliest and most stimulating imaginable; and have surprised me, for I have never found it easy to picture Henry as a popular hero of fiction.

He isn't, of course, a hero at all. His weaknesses are too plain—the little evidences of vanity in him, his self-centred moments, his errant susceptibilities—and heroes can't have weaknesses. And heroes—in any well-regulated pattern-story—must 'turn out well.' Henry, in this book, doesn't really turn out at all. His success in Episode X is a rather alarming accident. I think he'll do well enough, when he's forty or so. At twenty, no. He has huge doses of life's medicine yet to swallow. And all his problems are complicated by the touch of genius that is in him.

Another thing: there couldn't have been a Mamie Wilcox in our pattern-story. And certainly not a Corinne. Hardly even a Martha. For a 'divided love interest' destroys your pattern. Yet Marthas, Corinnes, Mamies occur everywhere. So I can't very well apologise for their presence here.

We might, of course, have had Henry overthrow the Old Cinch in Sunbury; clean up the town. But he didn't happen to be a St George that summer. And then, so many heroes of pattern-stories, these two decades, have slain municipal dragons!

He might have listened in a deeper humility to the worldly wisdom of Uncle Arthur. But he didn't. He had to live his own life, not Uncle Arthur's. His way was the harder, but he couldn't help that.

I would have liked to pursue further the Mildred-Humphrey romance; including Arthur V. and the curious triangle that resulted; but the crisis didn't come in that year.

And against the temptation to dwell with Madame Watt

and her husband I have had, here, to set my face. Though something of that story will be told in a book yet to come, dealing with an older, changed Henry. The richly dramatic career of *Madame* underlay the irony of Henry's marriage; and we shall have to deal with that, or at least with the events that grew out of it.

I have said that Henry would turn out well enough in time. From the angle of the pattern-story this obviously couldn't be. It would be said that if he was ever to succeed he should have got started by this time in habits of industry and so forth.

I won't say that this is nonsense, but instead will quote from the autobiography of Charles Francis Adams (Houghton Mifflin Company, 1916). Mr Adams, from his fifteenth to his twenty-fifth year, kept a diary. Then he sealed the volumes in a package. Thirty years later he opened the package and read every word. He says :—

'The revelation of myself to myself was positively shocking. . . . It wasn't that the thing was bad or that my record was discreditable; it was worse! It was silly. That it was crude, goes without saying. *That* I didn't mind! But I did blush and groan and swear over its unmistakable, unconscious immaturity and ineptitude, its conceit, its weakness and its cant. . . . As I finished each volume it went into the fire; and I stood over it until the last leaf was ashes. . . . I have never felt the same about myself since. I now humbly thank fortune that I have got almost through life without making a conspicuous ass of myself.'

Mr Adams, immediately after the period covered by the diary, plunged into the Civil War, and emerged with the well-earned brevet rank of brigadier-general. He was later eminent as publicist, author, administrator, a recognised leader of thought in a troublous time. He became president of the Union Pacific Railroad. And at the last he was the subject of a memorial address by the Honorable Henry Cabot Lodge.

As Henry is still several years short of twenty-five perhaps there is hope for him.

Concord, Mass. S. M.

CONTENTS

I

It was late May in Sunbury, Illinois, and twenty minutes past eight in the morning.

The spacious lawns and the wide strips of turf between sidewalk and roadway in every avenue and street were lush with crowding young blades of green. The maples, oaks, and elms were vivid with the exuberant youth of the year.

Throughout the village, brisk young men, care-worn men of middle age, a few elderly men were hurrying toward the old red-brick station whence the eight-twenty-nine would shortly carry them into the dust and sweat and smoke of a business day in Chicago. The swarms of sleepy-eyed clerks, book-keepers, office boys and girl stenographers had gone in on the seven-eleven and the seven-thirty-two.

Along Simpson Street the grocers, in their aprons, already had out their sidewalk racks heaped with seasonable vegetables and fruits (out-of-season delicacies had not then become commonplaces of life in Sunbury; strawberries appeared when the local berries were ripe, not sooner). The two butcher shops were decorated with red and buff carcasses hung in rows. A whistling, coatless youth had just swept out Donovan's drug store and was wiping off the marble counter before the marble and glass soda fountain. Through the windows of the Sunbury National Bank Alfred Knight could be seen filling the inkwells and putting out fresh blotters and pens. The neat little restaurant known as 'Stanley's' (the Stanleys were a respectable coloured couple) was still nearly full of men who ate ham and eggs, pounded beef-steak, fried potatoes, and buckwheat cakes, and drank huge

cups of gray-brown coffee; with, at the rear tables, two or three family groups. And from numerous boarding-houses and dormitories in the northern section of the overgrown village students of both sexes were converging on the oak-shaded campus by the lake.

All of Sunbury appeared to be up and about the business of the day; all, perhaps, except Henry Calverly, 3rd, who sat, dressed except for his coat, heavy-eyed, a hair brush in either hand, hands resting limp on knees, on the edge of his narrow iron bed. This, in Mrs Wilcox's boarding-house in Douglass Street, one block south of Simpson; top floor.

If the present reader has, by chance, had earlier acquaintance with Henry, it should be explained that he is now to be pictured not as a youth of eighteen going on nineteen but as a young man of twenty going on twenty-one.

That figure, twenty-one, of significance in the secret thoughts of any growing boy, was of peculiar, stirring significance to the sensitive, imaginative Henry. It marked the beginning of what is sometimes termed Life. It suggested alarming but interesting responsibilities. On that day, beginning with the stroke of the midnight hour, guardians ceased to function and independence set in. One was a citizen. One voted. In Henry's case, the crowning symbol of manhood would be deferred a year, as Election Day was to fall on the fifth of November and his birthday was the seventh; but that so trivial a mere fact bore small weight in the face of potential citizenship might have been indicated by the faint blonde fringe along his upper lip. This fringe was a new venture. He stroked it much of the time, and stole glances at it in mirrors. He could twist it up a little at the ends.

The rest of him indicated a taste that was hardly bent on the inexpensive as such. His duck trousers (this was the middle nineties) were smartly creased and rustled with starch. His white canvas shoes were not 'sneakers' but had heavy soles and half-heels of red rubber. His coat, lying now across the iron tube that marked the foot of the bed, was a double-breasted blue serge, unlined, well-tailored. The hat, hung on a mirror post above the 'golden

oak' bureau, was of creamy white felt. He had given up spectacles for nose glasses with a black silk cord.

Nearly two years earlier his mother had died. He had lived on, caught in a drift of time and circumstance, keeping, without any particular plan, this little room with its sloping ceiling. The price was an item, of course—six dollars a week for room and board. You couldn't do better in Sunbury, even then. Memories haunted the place, naturally enough. Loneliness had dwelt close with him.

His mother's picture, in a silver frame, stood at the right of the pincushion; at the left, in hammered brass ('repoussé work') was a 'cabinet size' photograph of Martha Caldwell. A woven-wire rack on the wall held half a hundred snapshots of girls, boys, and groups, in about a third of which figured Martha's smiling, sensible, pleasantly freckled face. A guitar in an old green bag leaned against the wall behind his mother's old trunk; it had not been out of the bag in more than a year. An assortment of neck-ties hung over the gas-jet by the bureau. Tacked about on the wall were six or eight copies of Gibson girls; rather good copies, barring a certain stiffness of line. On the seat in the one dormer window reposed two cushions, one covered with college pennants, the other with cigar bands laboriously cross-stitched together; both from the hands of Martha.

Henry's little bookcase was not uninteresting. It contained the following books: *Daily Strength for Daily Needs*, Browning, Trollope, and Hawthorne in sets, *Sonnets, from the Portuguese*, *Words often Mispronounced*, Longfellow, complete in one fat volume. Red Line Edition, and *Six Thousand Puzzles*, all of which had been his mother's; Green's *History of the English People*, Boswell's *Johnson*, both largely uncut, and the *Discourses of Epictetus*, which three had come as Christmas or birthday gifts; and exactly one volume, a work by an obscure author (who was pictured in the frontispiece with a bristling moustache and intensely knit brows) entitled *Will Power and Self Mastery*, which offered the only clue as to Henry's own taste in book buying.

His taste in reading was another matter. The novels and romances he had devoured during certain periods of

his teens had mostly come from the Sunbury Free Public Library. Lately, however, apart from thrilling moments with *The Prisoner of Zenda*, *Under the Red Robe*, and *The Princess Aline*, he had found difficulty in reading at all. Something was stirring within him, something restlessly positive, an impulse to give out rather than take in. Though he had, at intervals, lunged with determination at the Green and the Boswell. This effort, indeed, had been repeated so many times that he occasionally caught himself speaking of these authors as if he had read them exhaustively.

The bottom drawer of the bureau was a third full of unfinished manuscripts—attempts at novels, short stories, poems, plays—each faithfully reflecting its immediate source of inspiration. There were paragraphs that might have been written by a little Dickens; there were thinly diluted specimens of Dumas, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Richard Harding Davis, Thackeray. The rest was all Kipling, prose and verse. Everybody was writing Kipling then.

2

A step sounded in the hall. The knob turned softly; the door opened a little way; and the thinnish, moderately pretty face of Mamie Wilcox appeared—pale blue eyes with the beginnings of hollows beneath them, fair skin, straight hay-coloured hair, wisps of it straying down across forehead and cheek, thin nose, soft but rather sulky mouth. She was probably twenty-two or twenty-three at this time.

All she said was, 'Oh!'—very low.

'Wonder you wouldn't knock!' said he.

'Wonder you wouldn't get up before noon!' she responded smartly, but still in that cautious voice; then added, 'Here, I'll leave the towels, and come back.' And she slipped into the room, a heavier and more shapely figure of a girl than was suggested by the face, a girl in a full-length gingham apron and little shoes with unexpectedly high heels; not 'French' heels, but the sloping style known then as 'military.'

Henry's colour was rising a little. He cleared his throat, and said, mumbling, 'Leave anything you like.'

'I'll do just that,'—she turned, with a flirt of her apron and stood, between washstand and door, surveying him—'what I like, and nothing more.' . . . Her eyes wandered now from him to the picture at the left of the pincushion, then to the snapshots on the wall, and she smiled, very self-contained, very knowing, with the expression that the young call 'sarcastic.' The adjective came to mind. Henry's colour was mounting higher.

'Pretty snappy to-day, ain't we?' said he.

'Yes, when we're snapped at,' said she.

There was a silence that ran on into seconds and tens of seconds.

Then, acting on an impulse of astonishing suddenness, he sprang toward her.

With almost equal agility she stepped away. But he caught one hand.

She had the door-knob in her other hand. She drew the door open, then, indecisively, pushed it nearly to.

'Be careful!' she whispered. 'They'll hear!'

She made a small effort to free her hand. For a moment they stood tugging at each other.

When Henry spoke, in an effort to appear the off-hand man of the world he assuredly was not, his voice sounded weak and husky.

'Whew—strong!'

'Suppose I slapped.'

'Slap all you like.'

'What would Martha Caldwell say?'

There was a gloomy sort of anger on Henry's red face. He jerked her violently toward him.

'Stop! You're hurting my wrist!' With which she yielded a little. He found himself about to take her in his arms. He heard her whispering—'For Heaven's sake be careful! They'll surely hear!'

He was most unhappy. He pushed her roughly away, and rushed to the window.

He knew from the silence that she was lingering. He hated her. And himself.

She said: 'Well, you needn't get mad.'

Then, slowly, cautiously, she let herself out. He heard her moving composedly along the hall.

He felt weak. And deeply guilty. For a long time this moment had been a possibility; now it had taken place. What if some one had seen her come in! What if she should come again! What if she should tell! . . .

He found one hair brush on the floor, the other on the bed, and brushed his hair; donned his coat, buttoning it and smoothing it down about his shapely torso with a momentary touch of complacency; glanced at the mirror; twisted up his moustache; then stood waiting for his colour to go down.

Suddenly, with one of his quick impulses, he sprang at the bookcase, drew out the *Epictetus*—it was a little book, bound in 'ooze' calf of an olive-green colour—and read these words (the book opened there):—

'To the rational animal only is the irrational intolerable.

He lowered the book and repeated the phrase aloud.

3

A little later—red about the ears, and given to sudden starts when the swinging pantry doors opened to let a student waiter in or out—he sat, quite erect, in the dining room and bolted a boarding-house breakfast of stewed prunes, oatmeal, fried steak, fried potatoes, fried mush swimming in brown sugar syrup, and coffee. The *Discourses of Epictetus* lay at his elbow.

After this he walked—stiffly self-conscious, book under arm—over to Simpson Street, and took a chair and an *Inter Ocean* at Schultz and Schwartz's, among the line of those waiting to be shaved.

This accomplished he paused outside, on the curb, to pencil this entry in a red pocket account-book:—

'Shave—10 c.'

He wavered when passing Donovan's; stepped in and

consumed a frosted maple shake. Which necessitated the further entry in the red book :—

'Soda—10 c.'

In front of Berger's grocery he met Martha Caldwell. They walked together to the corner.

Martha was a sizable girl, about as tall as Henry, with large blue eyes, an attractively short nose, abundant brown hair coiled away under her flat straw hat, and a general air of good sense. Martha was really a good-looking young woman, and would have been popular had not Henry stood in her light. She had a small gift at drawing (the Gibson copies in Henry's room were hers) and danced gracefully enough. Monday and Thursday evenings were his regular calling times; and there were so many other evenings when he was expected to take her to this house or that with 'the crowd' that the other local 'men' had long since given up calling at her house. But they were not engaged.

On this occasion there was constraint between them. They spoke of the lovely weather. She, knowing Henry pretty well, looked with some curiosity at his book. Henry glanced sidelong at her across a wide bottomless gulf, and stroked his moustache. He was groping desperately for words. He began to resent her. He presented an outer front of stern self-control.

At the corner they stopped and stood in a silence that grew rapidly embarrassing.

She lowered her eyes and dug with the point of her parasol in the turf by the stone walk.

He thrust both hands into his trousers' pockets, spread his feet, and stared across at the long veranda of the Sunbury House. It seemed to him that he had never been so unhappy.

'Are you'—Martha began; hesitated; went on—'were you thinking of coming around this evening?'

'Why—it's Thursday, ain't it?'

'Yes,' she said, 'it's Thursday.'

'Listen, Martha!' Was it possible that she suspected something? But how could she! His ears were getting red again. He knew it. She must never, never know about

Mamie! . . . 'Listen, I may have to go down to Mrs Arthur V. Henderson's.'

'Oh,' she murmured, 'that musicale.'

'Yes.' Eagerness was creeping into his voice. 'Anne Mayer Stelton. She's been over studying with Marchesi, you know. Mrs Henderson asked specially to have me cover it.'

'Why don't you go?'

'Well—you see how it is. Of course, I'd hate——'

'You'd better go.' Saying which Martha turned away down Filbert Avenue, and left him standing there.

He bit his lip; pulled at his moustache. 'I ought to do something for her,' he thought. 'Buy some flowers—or a box of Devoe's.'

This was an idle thought; for the day, Thursday, lay much too close to the financially lean end of the week to permit of flowers or candy. And he hadn't asked anywhere for a dollar of credit these nearly two years. Still, he felt faintly the warmth of his kindly intention.

It didn't seem altogether right to let her go like that. They had not before drifted so near a quarrel. On the farther side of the street he paused, and glanced down the avenue.

A smart trap that he had never seen before had pulled up, midway of the block. An impeccable coachman sat stiffly upon an indubitable box. A man who appeared to have reddish hair, dressed in a brown cutaway suit and Derby hat, a man with a pronounced if close-cropped red moustache and a suggestively interesting band of mourning about his left sleeve, was leaning out, gracefully, graciously, talking to—Martha. And Martha was listening.

Henry moved on, little confused pangs of quite unreasonable jealousy stabbing at his heart, and entered the business-and-editorial office of *The Weekly Voice of Sunbury*, where he worked.

Here he laid down the *Discourses of Epictetus* and asked Humphrey Weaver, untitled editor of the paper (old man Boice, the owner, would never permit any one but himself to be known by that title), for the galley proofs of the week's 'Personal Mention.'

He found this item :—

Mr James B. Merchant, Jr., of Greggs, Merchant & Co., was a guest of Mr and Mrs Ames at the Country Club on Saturday evening. Mr Merchant has leased for the summer the apartment of M. B. Wills, on Lower Filbert Avenue.

That was the man ! James B. Merchant was a bachelor, rich, a famous cotillion leader on the South Side, Chicago, an only son of the original James B. Merchant.

And Martha had gone to the Country Club Saturday with the Ameses. This curious tension between himself and Martha had then first bordered on the acute. Mr Ames disapproved of Henry; he felt that Martha shouldn't have gone . And now, of course, her lack of consideration for himself was leading her into new complications.

He sat moodily fingering the papers on the littered, ink-stained table that served him for a desk. He was disturbed, uncomfortable, but couldn't settle on what seemed a proper mental attitude. He was jealous; but he mustn't let his jealousy carry him to the point of taking a definite stand with Martha, because—well . . .

Life seemed very difficult.

4

The *Voice* office occupied what had once been a shop, opposite the hotel. The show window of plate glass now displayed the splintery rear panels of old Mr Boice's roll-top desk, that was heaped, on top, with back numbers of the *Voice*, the *Inter Ocean* and the *Congressional Record*, and a pile of inky zinc etchings mounted on wood blocks.

Within, back of a railing, were Humphrey Weaver's desk and Henry Calverly's table.

Humphrey was tall, rather thin and angular, with a long face, long nose, long chin, swarthy complexion, and quick, quizzical brown eyes with innumerable fine wrinkles about them. When he smiled, his whole face seemed to wrinkle back, displaying many large teeth in a cavernous mouth.

Humphrey might have been twenty-five or six. He was a reticent young man, with no girl or women friends that one ever saw, a fondness for the old corn-cob that he was always scraping, filling, or smoking, and a secret passion for the lesser known laws of physics. He lived alone, in a barn back of the old Parmenter place. He had divided the upper story into living and sleeping rooms, and put in hardwood floors and simple furniture and a piano. Downstairs, in what he called his shop, were lathes, a workbench, innumerable wood-and-metal working tools, a dozen or more of heavy metal wheels set, at right angles, in circular frames, and several odd little round machines suspended from the ceiling at the ends of twisted cords. In one corner stood a number of box kites, very large ones. And there were large planes of silk on spruce frames. He was an alumnus of the local university, but had made few friends, and had never been known in the town. Henry hadn't heard of him before the previous year, when he had taken the desk in the *Voice* office.

'Say, Hen,'—Henry looked up from his copy paper—'Mrs Henderson looked in a few minutes ago, and left a programme and a list of guests for her show to-night. She wants to be sure and have you there. You can do it, can't you?'

Henry nodded listlessly.

'It seems there's to be a contralto, too—somebody that's visiting her. She—Sister Henderson—appears to take you rather seriously, my boy. Wants you particularly to hear the new girl. One Corinne Doag. We,'—Humphrey smoked meditatively, then finished his sentence—'we talked you over, the lady and I. I promised you'd come.'

At noon, the editorial staff of two lunched at Stanley's.

'Wha'd you and Mrs Henderson say about me?' asked Henry, over the pie.

'She says,' remarked Humphrey, the wrinkles multiplying about his eyes, 'that you have temperament. She thinks it's a shame.'

'What's a shame?' muttered Henry.

'Whatever has happened to you. I told her you were the steadiest boy I ever knew. Don't drink, smoke, or flirt.

I didn't add that you enter every cent you spend in that little red book; but I've seen you doing it and been impressed. But I mentioned that you're the most conscientious reporter I ever saw. That started her. It seems that you're nothing of the sort. My boy, she set you before me in a new light. You begin to appear complex and interesting.'

Still muttering, Henry said, 'Nothing so very interesting about me.'

'It seems that you put on an opera here—directed it, or sang it, or something. Before my time.'

'That was *Iolanthe*,' said Henry, with a momentarily complacent memory.

'And you sang—all over the place, apparently. Why don't you sing now?'

'It's too,'—Henry was mumbling, flushing, and groping for a word—'too physical.'

Then, with a sudden movement that gave Humphrey a little start, the boy leaned over the table, pulled at his moustache, and asked, gloomily: 'Listen! Do you think a man can change his nature?'

Humphrey considered this without a smile. 'I don't see exactly how, Hen.'

'I mean if he's been heedless and reckless—oh, you know, girls, debts, everything. Just crazy, sorta.'

'Well, I suppose a man can reform. Were you a very bad lot?' The wrinkled smile was reassuring.

'That depends on what you—I wasn't exactly sporty, but—oh, you don't know the trouble I've had, Humphrey. Then my mother died, and I hadn't been half-decent to her, and I was left alone, and my uncle had to pay my debts out of the principal—it was hundreds of dollars——'

His voice died out.

There was an element of pathos in the picture before him that Humphrey recognised with some sympathy—the gloomy lad of twenty, with that absurd little moustache that he couldn't let alone. After all, he *had* been rather put to it. It began to appear that he had suppressed himself without mercy. There would doubtless be reactions. Perhaps explosions.

Henry went on :—

'I don't know what's happened to me. I don't feel right about things. I'—he hesitated, glanced up, then down, and his ears reddened—'I've been going with Martha Caldwell, you know. For a long time.'

Humphrey nodded.

'Mondays and Thursdays I go over there, and other times. I don't seem to want to go any more. But I get mixed up about it. I—I don't want them to say I'm fickle. They used to say it.'

'You've evidently got gifts,' observed Humphrey, as if thinking aloud. 'You've got some fire in you. The trouble with you now, of course, is that you're stale.' Humphrey deliberately considered the situation, then remarked : 'You asked me if a man can change his nature. I begin to see now. You've been trying to do that to yourself, for quite a while.'

Henry nodded.

'Well, I suppose you'll find that you can't do it. Not quite that. The fire that's in you isn't going to stop burning just because you tell it to.'

'But what's a fellow to do?'

'I don't know. Just stick along, I suppose, gradually build up experience until you find work you can let yourself go in. Some way, of course, you've got to let yourself go, sooner or later.'

Henry, his eyes nervously alert now, his slim young body tense, was drawing jerkily with his fork on the coarse table-cloth.

'Yes,' he broke out, with the huskiness in his voice that came when his emotions pressed—'yes, but what if you can't let yourself go without letting everything go? What if the fire burns you !'

Humphrey found it difficult to frame a reply. He got no further, this as they were leaving the restaurant, than to say, 'Of course, one man can't advise another.'

5

As they were turning into the *Voice* office, Henry caught sight of Mamie Wilcox, in a cheap pink dress and flapping pink-and-white hat, loitering by the hotel. He fell back behind Humphrey. Mamie beckoned with her head. He nodded, and entered the office; and she moved slowly on around the corner of the avenue.

He mumbled a rather unnecessary excuse to Humphrey, and slipped out, catching up with her on the avenue. She was unpleasantly attractive. She excited him.

'What is it?' he asked, walking with her. 'Did you want to speak to me?'

'Stuck up, aren't we!'

'Well?'

She pouted. 'Take a little walk with me. I do want to talk with you.'

'Haven't time. Got to get right back to the office.'

'Well—listen, meet me to-night. I can get out by eight. It's pretty important. Maybe serious.'

'Is it—did anybody——'

She nodded. 'Mrs MacPherson. She was right in her door when I came out of your room.'

'Did she say anything?'

'She looked a lot.'

'Well, say—I'll see you for a few minutes to-night. Say about eight.' This was best. It would be dark, or near it. He simply mustn't be seen strolling with Mamie Wilcox along Filbert Avenue in broad daylight. 'What do you say to Douglass Street and the Lake Shore Drive?'

'All right. Tell you what—bring a tandem along and take me for a ride.'

'Oh, I can't.' But his will was weak. 'Got to report a concert. I don't know, though. I s'pose I could get around at half-past nine or ten and hear the last numbers.'

He had often done this. Besides, he could probably manage it earlier. He knew he could rent a tandem at Murphy's cigar store down by the tracks. A quite wild,

wholly fascinating stir of adventure was warming his breast and bringing that huskiness into his voice. He was letting go. He felt daring and a little mad. He hadn't realised, before to-day, that Mamie had such a lure about her.

Before returning to the office he got his bank-book and brazenly drew from the bank, savings department, his entire account, amounting to ten dollars forty-six cents. He also bespoke the tandem.

These were the great days of bicycling. The first high-wheeled, rattling horseless carriage was not to appear in the streets of Sunbury for a year or two yet. Bicycle clubs flourished. Memorial Day each year (they called it Decoration Day) was a mad rush of excursion and road races. Every Sunday witnessed a haggard-eyed humpbacked horde of 'Scorchers' in knickerbockers or woollen tights. Many of the young men one met on train and street wore medals with a suspended chain of gold bars, one for each 'century run.'

And these were the first great days of the bloomer girl. She was legion. Sometimes her bloomers were bloomers, sometimes they were knickerbockers, sometimes little more than the tights of the racing breed. She was dusty, sweaty, loud. She was never the sort of girl you knew; but always appeared from the swarming, dingy back districts of the city. Sometimes she rode a single wheel, sometimes tandem with some male of the humpbacked breed and of the heavily muscled legs and the grotesquely curved handle bars. The bloomer girl was looked at askance by the well-bred folk of the shaded suburbs. Ministers thumped pulpits and harangued half-empty pews regarding this final moral, racial disaster while she rode dustily by the very doors.

Henry, as he pedalled the long machine through back streets to the rendezvous, was glad that the twilight was falling fast. In his breast pocket were copy paper and pencils, in an outer pocket his little olive-green book. His white trousers were caught about the ankles with steel clips.

Mamie kept him waiting. He hid both himself and the

wheel in the shadows of the tall lilac bushes in the little village park.

She came at length, said 'Hello!' and with a little deft unhooking, coolly stepped out of her skirt, rolled up that garment, thrust it under a bush, and stood before him in the sort of wheeling costume rarely seen in Sunbury save on Saturdays and Sundays when the Chicago crowds were pouring through.

Henry stood motionless, silent, in the dusk.

'Well,' said she, smartly, 'are we riding?'

Without a word he wheeled out the bicycle and they rolled away.

She was very close, there before him. She bent over the handle bars like an old-timer, and pedalled with something more than the abandon of a boy. It was going to be hard to talk to her . . . If he could only blot this day out of his life. 'She started it,' he thought fiercely, staring out ahead over her rhythmically moving shoulder. 'I never asked her to come in!'

'I didn't know you rode a wheel,' said he, after a time, dismally.

'I ride Sundays with the boys from Pennyweather Point. But you needn't tell that at home.'

'I'm not telling anything at home,' muttered Henry.

Then she flung back at him the one word, 'Surprised?'

'Well—why, sorta.'

'You thought I was satisfied to do the room work and wash dishes, I suppose!'

'I don't know as I thought anything.'

'What's the matter, anyway? Scared at my bloomers?'

'That's what you call 'em, is it?'

'I must say you're grand company.'

He made no reply.

They pedalled past the university buildings, the athletic field, the lighthouse, up a grade between groves of oak, out along the brink of a clay bluff overlooking the steely dark lake—horizonless, still, a light or two twinkling far out.

'Shall we go to Hoffman's?' she asked.

'I don't care where we go,' said he.

6

The Weekly Voice of Sunbury was put to press every Friday evening, was printed during that night, and appeared in the first mail on Saturday mornings.

Friday, therefore, was the one distractingly busy day for Humphrey Weaver. And it was natural enough that he should snatch at Henry's pencilled report of the musicale at Mrs Henderson's with the briefest word of greeting, and give his whole mind, blue copy-editing pencil posed in air, to reading it. But he did note that the boy looked rather haggard, as if he hadn't slept much. He heard his mumbled remark that he had been over at the public library, writing the thing; and perhaps wondered mildly and momentarily why the boy should be writing at the library and not at home, and why he should speak of the fact at all. And now and again during the day he was aware of Henry, pale, dog-eyed, inclined to hang about as if confidences were trembling on his tongue. And he was carrying a little olive-green book around; drew it from his pocket every now and then and read or turned the pages with an ostentatious air of concentration, as if he wanted to be noticed. Humphrey decided to ask him what the trouble was; later, when the paper was put away. When he might have spoken, old man Boice was there, at his desk. And Humphrey never got out to meals on Fridays. Henry got all his work in on time: the 'Real Estate Notes' for the week and the last items for 'Along Simpson Street.'

The report of the musicale would have brought a smile or two on another day. There was nearly a column of it. Henry had apparently been deeply moved by the singing of Anne Mayer Stelton. He dwelt on the 'velvet suavity' of her legato passages, her firmness of attack and the 'delicate lace work of her colourature.' 'Mme. Stelton's art,' he wrote, 'has deepened and broadened appreciably since she last appeared in Sunbury. Always gifted with a splendid singing organ, always charming in personality and profoundly rhythmically musical in temperament, she now has added a superstructure of technical authority,

which gives to each passage, whether bravura or pianissimo, a quality and distinction seldom heard in this country. Miss Corinne Doag also added immeasurably to the pleasure of the select audience by singing a group of songs. Miss Corinne Doag has a contralto voice of fine *verve* and *timbre.* She is a guest of Mrs Henderson, who herself accompanied delightfully. Among those present were :—'

Henry's writing always startled you a little. Words fairly flowed through his pencil, long words, striking words. He had the word sense; this when writing. In speech he remained just about where he had been all through his teens, loose of diction, slurring and eliding and using slang as did most of the Middle-Westerners among whom he had always lived, and, like them, swallowing his 'r's' down his throat.

Humphrey initialed the copy, tossed it into the devil's basket, turned to a pile of proofs, paused as if recollecting something, picked up the copy again, glanced rapidly through it, and turned on his assistant.

'Look here, Hen,' he remarked, 'you don't tell what they sang, either of 'em. Or who *were* among those present.'

Henry was reading his little book at the moment, and fumbling at his moustache. A mournful object.

He turned now, with a start, and stared, wide-eyed, at Humphrey. His lips parted, but he didn't speak. A touch of colour appeared in his cheeks.

Then, as abruptly, he went limp in his chair.

'I thought she left a list here, and a programme,' he said, eyes now on the floor.

Humphrey's practised eye ran swiftly over the double row of pigeonholes before him. 'Right you are!' he exclaimed.

It was a quarter past eleven that night when Humphrey scrawled his last 'O.K.'; stretched out his long form in his swivel chair; yawned; said, 'Well, *that's* done, thank God!'; and hummed and tapped out on his bare desk the refrain of a current song :—

'But you'd look sweet
On the seat
Of a bicycle built for two.'

He turned on Henry with a wrinkly, comfortable grin.

'Well, my boy, it's too late for Stanley's but what do you say to a bite at Ericson's, over by the tracks?'

Then he became fully aware of the woebegone look of the boy, fiddling eternally with that moustache, fingering the leaves of his little book, and added :—

'What on earth is the matter with you !'

Henry gazed long at his book, swallowed, and said weakly :—

'I'm in trouble, Humphrey.'

'Oh, come, not so bad as all——'

He was silenced by the sudden plaintive appeal on Henry's face. Mr Boice, a huge-slow-moving figure of a man with great white whiskers, was coming in from the press room.

They walked down to the little place by the tracks. Humphrey had a roast-beef sandwich and coffee; Henry gloomily devoured two cream puffs.

There Humphrey drew out something of the story. It was difficult at first. Henry could babble forth his most sacred inner feelings with an ingenuous volubility that would alarm a naturally reticent man, and he could be bafflingly secretive. To-night he was both, and neither. He was full of odd little spiritual turnings and twistings—vague as to the clock, intent on justifying himself, submerged in a boundless bottomless sea of self-pity. Humphrey, touched, even worried, finally went at him with direct questions, and managed to piece out the incident of the Thursday morning in the boy's room.

'But I never asked her in,' he hurried to explain. 'She came in. Maybe after that it was my fault, but I didn't ask her in.'

'But as far as I can see, Hen, it wasn't so serious. You didn't make love to her.'

'I tried to.'

'Oh yes. She doubtless expected that. But she got away.'

'But don't you see, Hump, Mrs MacPherson saw her coming out. She'd been snooping. Musta heard some of

it. That's why Mamie hung around for me yesterday noon.'

'Oh, she hung around?'

Henry swallowed, and nodded. 'That's why I slipped out again after lunch yesterday. I didn't want to tell you.'

'Naturally. A man's little flirtations——'

'But wait, Hump! She was excited about it. And she seemed to think it was up to me, somehow. I couldn't get rid of her.'

'Well, of course——'

'She made me promise to see her last night——'

'But—wait a minute!—last night——'

'This was the first part of the evening. She made me promise to rent Murphy's tandem——'

'Hm! you *were* going it!'

'And we rode up the shore a ways.'

'Then you didn't hear all of the musicale?'

'No. She wanted to go up to Hoffmann's Garden. So we went there——'

'But good lord, that's six miles——'

'Eight. You can do it pretty fast with a tandem. The place was jammed. I felt just sick about it. The waiter made us walk clear through, past all the tables. I coulda died. You see, Mamie, she—but I had to be a sport, sorta.'

'Oh, you had to go through with it, of course.'

'Sure! I *had* to. It was awful.'

'Anybody there that knew you?'

Henry's colour rose and rose. He gazed down intently at the remnant of a cream puff; pushed it about with his fork. Then his lips formed the word, 'Yes.'

Humphrey considered the problem. 'Well,' he finally observed, 'after all, what's the harm? It may embarrass you a little. But most fellows pick up a girl now and then. It isn't going to kill anybody.'

'Yes, but'—Henry's emotions seemed to be all in his throat to-night; he swallowed—'but it—well, Martha was there.'

'Oh—Martha Caldwell?'

'Yes. And Mary Ames and her mother. They were with Mr Merchant's party.'

'James B., Junior?'

'Yes. They drove up in a trap. I saw it outside. We weren't but three tables away from them. They saw everything. Mamie, she——'

'After all, Hen. It's disturbing and all that, but you were getting pretty tired of Martha——'

'It isn't that, Hump! I don't know that I was. I get mixed. But it's the shame, the disgrace. The Ameses have been down on me anyway, for something that happened two years ago. And now . . . ! And Martha, she's—well, can't you see, Hump? It's just as if there's no use of my trying to stay in this town any longer. They'll all be down on me now. They'll whisper about me. They're doing it now. I feel it when I walk up Simpson Street. They're going to mark me for that kind of fellow, and I'm not.'

His face sank into his hands.

Humphrey considered him; said, 'Of course you're not;' considered him further. Then he said, reflectively: 'It's unpleasant, of course, but I'll confess I can't see that what you've told me justifies the words "shame" and "disgrace." They're strong words, my boy. And as for leaving town . . . See here, Hen! Is there anything you haven't told me?'

The bowed head inclined a little farther.

'Hadn't you better tell me? Did anything happen afterward? Has the girl got—well, a real hold on you?'

The head moved slowly sidewise. 'We fought afterward, all the way home. Rowed. Jawed at each other like a pair of little muckers. No, it isn't that. I hated her all the time. I told her I was through with her. She tried to catch me in the hall this morning, up on the third floor. Came sneaking to my room again. With towels. That's why I wrote in the library.'

'But you aren't telling me what the rest of it was.'

'She—oh, she drank beer, and——'

'That's what most everybody does at Hoffmann's. The beer's good there.'

'I don't know. I don't like the stuff.'

'Come, Hen, tell me. Or drop it. Either.'

'I'll tell you. But I get so mad. It's—she—well, she wore pants.'

Humphrey's sympathy and interest were real, and he did not smile as he queried: 'Bloomers?'

'No, pants. Britches. I never saw anything so tight. Nothing else like 'em in the whole place. People nudged each other and laughed and said things, right out loud. Hump, it was terrible. And we walked clear through—past hundreds of tables—and away over in the corner—and there were the Ameses, and Martha, and——'

His head was up now; there was fire in his eyes; his voice trembled with the passion of a profound moral indignation.

'Hump, she's tough. She rides with that crowd from Pennyweather Point. She smokes cigarettes. She—she leads a double life.'

And neither did it occur to Humphrey, looking at the blazing youth before him, to smile at that last remark.

Humphrey had reached a point of real concern over Henry. He thought about him the last thing that night—pictured him living a lonely, spasmodically ascetic life, in the not over cheerful boarding-house of Mrs Wilcox—and the first thing the next morning.

The curious revelation of the later morning nettled him, perhaps, as a responsible editor, but, if anything, deepened his concern. He had the boy on his conscience, that was the size of it. He thought him over all the morning, before and after the revelation. After it he smoked steadily and hard, and knit his brows, and shook his head gravely, and chuckled.

Henry always came in between half-past eleven and twelve Saturdays to clip his contributions from the paper and paste them, end to end, in a 'string.' Then Humphrey would measure the string with a two-foot rule and fill out an order on the *Voice* Company for payment at the rate of a dollar and a quarter a column, or something less than seven cents an inch. Henry despairing of a raise from nine dollars a week had, months back, elected to work 'on space.'

That the result had not been altogether happy—he was averaging something less than nine dollars a week now—does not concern us here.

Humphrey contrived to keep busy until the string was made and measured; then proposed lunch.

At Stanley's, the food ordered, he leaned on his lank elbows and surveyed the dejected young man before him.

'Hen,' he remarked dryly, 'do you really think Anne Mayer Stelton's voice has a velvet suavity?'

Henry glanced up from his barley soup, coloured perceptibly, then dropped his eyes and consumed several spoonfuls of the tepid fluid.

'Why not?' said he.

'You feel, do you, that her art has deepened and broadened appreciably since she last appeared in Sunbury?'

Henry centred all his attention on the soup.

'You feel that she has really added a superstructure of technique during her study abroad?'

Henry's ears were scarlet now.

Humphrey, his soup turning cold between his elbows, looked steadily at his deeply unhappy friend.

For a moment longer Henry went on eating. But then he quietly laid down his spoon, sank rather limply back in his chair, and wanly met Humphrey's gaze.

'There was a moment this morning, Hen, when I could have wrung your neck. A moment.'

Henry's voice was colourless. His expression was that of a man who has absorbed his maximum of punishment, to whom nothing more matters much. 'What is it?' he asked. 'What happened?'

'Madame Stelton fell in the Chicago station, hurrying for the train, and sprained her ankle. Miss Doag gave the entire programme.'

Henry sat a little time considering this. Finally he raised his eyes.

'Hump,' he said, 'I don't know that I'm sorry. I'm rather glad you caught me, I think.'

It was a difficult speech to meet. Humphrey even found it a moving speech.

'You had an unlucky day,' he said.

Henry nodded. The roast beef and potato were before them now; but Henry pushed his aside. He ate nothing more.

'Mrs Henderson was in,' Humphrey added. 'I don't care what they say about her, she's a really pretty woman and bright as all get out.'

'Was she mad, Hump?'

'I—well, yes, I gathered the impression that you'd better not try to talk to her for a while. There she was, you see—came straight down to the office or stopped on her way to the train. Had Miss Doag along. Unusual dark brown eyes—almost black. A striking girl. But you won't meet her—not this trip. Though she couldn't help laughing once or twice. Over your phrases. You see you laid it on unnecessarily thick. *Verve. Timbre.* It puts you—I won't say in a bad light—but certainly in a rather absurd light.'

'Yes,' said Henry, gently, meekly, 'it does. It sorta completes the thing. I picked up some of the town talk this morning. They're laughing at me. And Martha cut me dead, not an hour ago. I've lost my friends. I'm sort of an outcast, I suppose. A—a pariah.'

There was a long silence.

'You'd better eat some food,' said Humphrey.

'I can't.' Henry was brooding, a tired droop to his mouth, a look of strain about the eyes. He began thinking aloud, rather aimlessly. 'It ain't as if I did that sort of thing. I never asked her to come in. I couldn't very well refuse to talk with her. She suggested the tandem. It did seem like a good idea to get her out of town, if I had to risk being seen with her. I'll admit I got mixed—awfully. I don't suppose I knew just what I was doing. But it was the first time in two years. Hump, you don't know how hard I've——'

'It's the first-time offenders that get most awfully caught,' observed Humphrey. 'But never mind that now. You're caught, Hen. No good explaining. You've just got to live it down.'

'That's what I've been doing for two years—living things

down. And look where it's brought me. I'm worse off than ever.'

There was a slight quivering in his voice that conveyed an ominous suggestion to Humphrey.

'Mustn't let the kid sink this way,' he thought. Then, aloud: 'Here's a little plan I want to suggest, Hen. You're stale. You're taking this too hard. You need a change.'

'I don't like to leave town, exactly, Hump—as if I was licked. I've changed about that.'

'You're not going to leave town. You're coming over to live with me. Move this afternoon.'

Henry seemed to find difficulty in comprehending this. Humphrey, suddenly a victim of emotion, pressed on, talking fast. 'I'll be through by four. You be packing up. Get an expressman and fetch your things. Here's my key. I'll let you pay something. We'll get our breakfasts.'

He had to stop. It struck him as silly, letting this forlorn youth touch him so deeply. He gulped down a glass of water. 'Come on,' he said brusquely, 'let's get out.' And on the street he added, avoiding those bewildered dog eyes—'I'm going to reshuffle you and deal you out fresh. That's all you need, a new deal.'

But to himself he added: 'It won't be easy. He *is* taking it hard. He's unstrung. I'll have to work it out slowly, head him around, build up his confidence. Teach him to laugh again. It'll take time, but it can be done. He's good material. Get him out of that darn boarding-house to start with.'

7

It was nearly five o'clock when Humphrey reached his barn at the rear of the Parmenter place. He found the outside door ajar.

'Hen's here now,' he thought.

He stepped within the dim shop, that had once been a carriage room, called, 'Hello there!' and crossed to the narrow stairway. There was no answer. He went on up.

On the rug in the centre of the living-room floor was a

heap consisting of an old trunk, a suit-case, a guitar in an old green woollen bag, two canes, an umbrella, and various loose objects—books, a small stand of shelves, two overcoats, hats, and a wire rack full of photographs.

The polished oak post at the head of the stairs was chipped, where they had pushed the trunk around. Humphrey fingered the spot; found the splinter on the floor; muttered, 'I'll glue it on, and rub over the cracks.'

He looked again at the disorderly heap in the centre of the room. 'It didn't occur to him to stow 'em away,' he mused. 'Probably didn't know where to put 'em.'

He set to work, hauling the trunk into a little unfinished room next to his own bedroom. He had meant to make a kitchen of this some day. He carried in the other things; then got a dust-pan and brushed off the rug.

The rooms were clean and tidy. Humphrey was a born bachelor; he had the knack of living alone in comfort. His books occupied all one wall of his bedroom, handy for night reading. He had running water there, and electric lights placed conveniently by the books, beside his mirror, and at the head of his bed.

He stood now in the living-room, humming softly and looking around with knit brows. After a few moments he stopped humming. He was struggling against a slight but definite depression. He had known it would be hard to give up room in his comfortable quarters to another; he had not known it would be as hard as it was now plainly to be. He started humming again, and moved about, straightening the furniture. This oddly pleasant home was his citadel. He had himself evolved it, in every detail, from a dusty, cobwebby old barn interior. He had run the wires and installed the water pipes and fixtures with his own hands. He seldom even asked his acquaintances in. There seemed no strong reason why he should do so.

'Hen shouldn't have left the door open like that,' he mused.

He thrust his hands into his pockets and whistled a little. Then he sighed.

'Well,' he thought, 'needn't be a hog. It's my chance to do a fairly decent turn. The boy hasn't a soul. Not yet.

He isn't the sort you can safely leave by himself. Got to be organised. Very likely I've got to build him over from the ground up. Might try making him read history. God knows he needs background. It'll take time. And patience. All I've got. Help him, little by little, to get hold of his self-esteem. Teach the kid to laugh again. That's it. I've taken it on. Can't quit. It seems to be my job.' And he sighed again. 'Have to get him a key of his own.'

There were footsteps below. Henry, his arms full of personal treasures and garments he had overlooked in packing, came slowly up the stairs.

'I put your things in there,' Humphrey pointed. 'We'll move the box couch in for you to-night.'

'That'll be fine,' said Henry, aimless of eye, weak of voice.

Humphrey's eyes followed him as he passed into the improvised bedroom; and he compressed his lips and shook his head.

Shortly Henry came out and sank mournfully on a chair. It was time for the first lesson. 'There's simply no life in the boy,' thought Humphrey. He cleared his throat, and said aloud :—

'Tell you what, Hen. We'll celebrate a little, this first evening. I've got a couple of chafing dishes and some odds and ends of food. And I make excellent drip coffee. If you'll go over to Berger's and get a pound or so of cheese for the rabbit, I'll look the situation over and figure out a meal. Charge it to me. I have an account there.'

Henry, without change of expression, got slowly up, said, 'All right,' hung around for a little time, wandering about the room, and finally wandered off down the stairs and out.

He returned at twenty minutes past midnight.

Humphrey was abed, reading Smith on Torsion. He put down the book and waited. He had left lights on downstairs and in the living-room. Since six o'clock he had passed through many and extreme states of feeling; at present he was in a state of suspense between worry and strongly suppressed wrath.

Henry came into the room—a little flushed, bright of eye, the sensitive corners of his mouth twitching nervously, alertly, happily upward. He even actually chuckled.

'Well, where—on—earth . . .'

Henry waved a light hand. 'Queerest thing happened. But say, I guess I owe you an apology, sorta. I ought to have sent word or something. Everything happened so quickly. You know how it is. When you're sorta swept off your feet like that——'

'Like what!'

'Oh—well, it was like this. I went over to get the cheese. . . . Funny, it doesn't seem as if it could have been to-day! Seems as if it was weeks ago that I moved my things over.' His eyes roved about the room; lingered on the books; followed out the details of the neat surface wiring with sudden interest.

'Go on!' From Humphrey, this, with grim emphasis that was wholly lost on the self-absorbed youth.

'Oh yes! Well, you see, I went over to Berger's and got the cheese; and just as I was coming out I ran into Mrs Henderson and Corinne.'

'Who!'

'Corinne Doag. You know. She's visiting there. Well, sir, I could have died right there. Fussed me so I turned around and was going back into the store. I was just plain rattled. And you were right about Mrs Henderson. She was kinda mad. She made me stand right up and take a scolding. Shook her finger at me right there in front of Berger's. That fussed me worse. Gee! I was red all over. But you see it sorta fussed Corinne Doag too—she was standing right there—and she got a little red. Wasn't it a scene, though! Sorta made us acquainted right off. You know, threw us together. Then she—Mrs Henderson—said I didn't deserve to meet a girl with verve and timbre, but just to show she wasn't the kind to harbour angry feelings she'd introduce us. And—and—I walked along home with 'em.'

He was looking again at the solid ranks of books that extended, floor to ceiling, across the end wall.

'Say, Hump, you don't mean to say you really read all those!'

'You walked home with them. Go on.'

'Oh, well, they asked me to stay to supper, and I did, and some folks came in, and we sang and things, and then we—oh, yes, how much was the cheese?'

'How in thunder do I know?'

'Well—there was a pound of it—Mrs Henderson made a rabbit . . .'

The none too subtle chill in the atmosphere about Humphrey seemed at last to be meeting and somewhat subduing the exuberant good cheer that radiated from Henry. He fell to fingering his moustache, and studying the bed-posts. Once or twice, he looked up, hesitated on the brink of speech, only to lower his eyes again.

Then, unexpectedly, he chuckled aloud, and said, 'She's a wonderful girl. At first she seems quiet, but when you get to know her . . . going to take a walk with me to-morrow morning. She was going to church with Mrs H., but I told her we'd worship in God's great outdoor temple.'

He yawned now. And stretched, deliberately, luxuriously like a healthy animal, his arms above his head.

'Well,' said he, 'it's late as all get out. I suppose you want to go to sleep.' He got as far as the door, then leaned confidingly against the wall. 'Look here, Hump, I don't want you to think I don't appreciate your taking me in like this. It's darn nice of you. Don't know what I'd have done if it wasn't for you. Well, good-night.'

He got part way out the door this time; then, brushed by a wave of his earlier moody self-consciousness, turned back. He even came in and leaned over the foot of the bed, and flushed a little. It occurred to Humphrey that the boy appeared to be momentarily ashamed of his present happiness.

'Do you know what was the matter with me?' he broke out. 'It was just what you said. I was taking things too hard. The great thing is to be rational, normal. Thing with me was I used to go to one extreme and now these last two years I've been going with all my might to the

other. Of course it wouldn't work . . . Do you know who's helped me a whole lot? You'd never guess.' Rather shamefaced, he drew from his pocket a little book bound in olive-green 'ooze' leather. 'It's this old fellow. Epictetus. Listen to what he says—"To the rational animal only is the irrational intolerable." That was the trouble with me. I just wasn't a rational animal. I *wasn't* . . . Well, I've got to say good-night.'

This time he went.

Humphrey heard him getting out of his clothes and into the bed that Humphrey himself had made up on the box couch. It seemed only a moment later that he was snoring —softly, slowly, comfortably, like a rational animal.

The minute hand of the alarm clock on Humphrey's bureau crept up to twelve, the hour hand to one. Then came a single resonant, reverberating boom from the big clock up at the university.

Slowly, lips compressed, Humphrey got up, and in his pyjamas and slippers went downstairs and switched off the door light he found burning there. The stair light could be turned off upstairs.

Then, instead of going up, he opened the door and stood looking out on the calm village night.

'Of all the——' he muttered inconclusively. 'Why it's—he's a—— Good God! It's the limit! It's—it's intolerable.'

The word, floating from his own lips, caught his ear. His frown began, very slowly, to relax. A dry, grudging smile wrinkled its way across his mobile face. And he nodded, deliberately. 'Epictetus,' he remarked, 'was right.'

II

IN SAND-FLY TIME

I

It was half-past nine of a Sabbath morning at the beginning of June. The beneficent sunshine streamed down on the park-like streets, on the shingled roofs of the many decorous but comfortable homes, on the wide lawns, on the hundreds of washed and brushed little boys and starched little girls that were marching meekly to the various Sunday schools, Presbyterian, Methodist, Episcopal, Congregational, Baptist. Above the new cement sidewalk on Simpson Street—where all the stores were closed except two drug stores and Swanson's flower shop—the sunshine quivered and wavered, bringing oppressive promise of the first really warm day of the young summer. Slow-swinging church bells sent out widening, reverberating circles of mellow tone through the still air.

The sun shone too on the old barn back of the Parmenter place.

The barn presented an odd appearance; the red paint of an earlier decade in the nineteenth century here faded to brown, there flaked off altogether, but the upstairs part, once the haymow, embellished with neat double windows. Below, giving on the alley, was a white-painted door with a single step and an ornamental boot scraper.

Within, in Humphrey's room, the bed was neatly made, clothes hung in a corner, shoes and slippers stood in a row.

In Henry's room the couch bed was a rumpled heap, a suit-case lay on the floor half-unpacked, a trunk was in the same condition, clothes, shoes, neckties, photographs were scattered about on table, chairs and floor, a box of books by the bed, the guitar in its old green woollen bag leaning against the door.

In a corner of the living-room the doors of an ingeniously contrived cupboard stood open, disclosing a sink, shelves of dishes, and a small ice-box.

Humphrey, in shirt, trousers and slippers, stood washing the breakfast things. He was smoking his cob pipe. His long, wrinkly, usually quizzical face, could Henry have seen it, was deathly sober.

Henry, however, could see only the lean back. And he looked at that only momentarily. He was busy smoothing the fringe along his upper lip and twisting it up at the ends. Too, he leaned slightly on his bamboo walking stick, staring down at it, watching it bend. Despite his white ducks and shoes, serge coat, creamy white felt hat on the back of his shapely head, despite the rather noticeable nose glasses with the black silk cord hanging from them to his lapel, he presented a forlorn picture. He wished Humphrey would say something. That long back was hostile. Henry was helpless before hostility, as before logic. Already they weren't getting on. Little things like washing dishes and making beds and—dusting! Humphrey was proving an old fuss-budget. And Henry couldn't think what to do about it. He could never—never in the world—do those fussy things, use his hands. He couldn't even flounder through the little mental processes that lead up to doing things with your hands. He wasn't that sort of person. Humphrey was.

'Oh, thunder—Hump!' Thus Henry, weakly. 'Let the old dishes slide a little while. I'll be back. It ain't my fault that I've got a date now.'

Humphrey set down a cup rather hard, rolled the dish-towel into a ball and threw it, with heat, after the cup, then strode to the window, nursing his pipe and staring out at the gooseberry and currant bushes in the back yard of the First Presbyterian parsonage across the alley.

Humphrey liked order. It was the breath of his life. Combined with solitude it spelled peace to his bachelor soul. But here it was only the second day and the place was a pigsty. What would it be in a week!

He was aware that Henry moved over, all hesitation, and with words, to shut the door of that hopelessly littered

bedroom. The boy appeared to have no intention of picking up his things; he wasn't even unpacking! Leaving his clothes that way! . . . The words he was so confusedly uttering were the absurdest excuses: 'Just shut the door—fix it all up when I get back—an hour or so . . .'

It was in a wave of unaccustomed sentimentalism that Humphrey had gathered him in. Humphrey had few visitors. You couldn't work with aimless youths hanging around. He knew all about that. Humphrey's evenings were precious. His time was figured out, Monday morning to Saturday night, to the minute. And the Sundays were always an orgy of work. But this youth, to whom he had opened his quarters and his slightly acid heart, was the most aimless being he had ever known. An utter surprise; a shock. Yet here he was, all over the place.

Humphrey was trying, by a mighty effort of will, to get himself back into that maudlin state of pity which had brought on all this trouble. If he could only manage again to feel sorry for the boy, perhaps he could stand him. But he could only bite his pipe-stem. He was afraid he might say something he would be sorry for. No good in that, of course. . . . No more peaceful study, all alone, propped up in bed, with a pipe and reading light! No more wonderful nights in the shop downstairs! No more holding to a delicately fresh line of thought—balancing along like a wire-walker over a street!

The boy was over by the stairs now, all apologies, mumbling useless words. But he was going—no doubt whatever as to that.

'I'm late now,' he was saying. 'What else can I do, Hump? I promised. She'll be looking for me now. If you just wouldn't be in such a thundering hurry about those darn dishes . . . I can't live like a machine. I just can't!'

'You could have cleaned up your room while you've been standing there,' said Humphrey, in a rumbling voice.

'No, I couldn't! Put up all my pictures and books and things! I'm not like you. You don't understand!'

Humphrey wheeled on him, pipe in hand, a cold light in

his eyes, a none-too-agreeable smile wrinkling the lower part of his face.

'I'm not asking much of you,' he said.

'Oh, thunder, Hump! Do you think I don't appreciate—'

'I'd be glad to help you. But you've got to do a *little* on your own account. For God's sake show some spine! Sand-fly! Damn it, this is more than I can stand! It smothers me! How can I work! How can I think!' He stopped short; bit his lip; turned back to the window and thrust his pipe into his mouth.

Humphrey knew without looking that the boy was fussing endlessly at that absurd moustache. And sighing—he heard that. He bit hard on his pipe-stem. The day was wrecked already. He would be boiling up every few moments; tripping over Henry's things; regretting his perhaps too harsh words. Yes, they were too harsh, of course.

Henry was muttering, mumbling, tracing out the pattern in the rug-border with his silly little stick. These words were audible:—

'I don't see why you asked me to come here. I suppose I . . . Of course, if you don't want me to stay here with you, I suppose I . . . Oh, well! I guess I ain't much good . . .'

The voice trailed huskily off into silence.

After all, there didn't seem to be any place the boy could stay, if not here. Living alone in a boarding-house hadn't worked at all. To send him out into the world would be like condemning him.

Henry moved off down the stairs, slowly, pausing once as if he had not yet actually determined to go.

Walking more briskly, he emerged from the alley and swung around into Filbert Avenue. The starched and shining children were pouring in an intermittent stream into the First Presbyterian chapel, behind the big church.

Gloom in his eyes, striking in a savage aimlessness with his cane at the grass, he passed the edifice. Walking thus, he felt a presence and lifted his eyes.

2

Approaching was a pleasant-looking young woman of twenty, of a good figure, a few girlish freckles across the bridge of her nose, abundant hair tucked in under her Sunday hat.

It was Martha Caldwell. She had a class in the Sunday-school.

Martha saw him. No doubt about that.

For the moment, in Henry's abasement of spirit, he half forgot that she had cut him dead, publicly, on Simpson Street on the Saturday. Or if it was not a forgetting it was a vagueness. Henry was full to brimming of himself. Not in years had he craved sympathy as he craved it to-day. The word 'craved,' though, isn't strong enough. It was an utter need. An outcast, perhaps literally homeless; for how could he go back to Humphrey's after what had occurred! He must pack his things, of course.

He raised his hand—slowly, a thought stiffly—toward his hat.

Martha moved swiftly by, staring past him, fixedly, her lips compressed, her colour rising.

Henry's hand hung suspended a moment, then sank to his side.

Henry himself was capable of any sort of heedlessness, but never of unkindness or of cutting a friend.

The colour surged hotly over his face and reddened his ears.

There was a chance—a pretty good chance, it seemed, as he recalled the pleasant Saturday evening over a rabbit—that he might find sympathy at Mrs Arthur V. Henderson's. That was one place, where, within twelve hours, Henry Calverley, 3rd, had had some standing. They had seemed to like him. Mrs Henderson had unquestionably played up to him. And her guest was a peach!

At a feverish pace, almost running, he went there.

3

Corinne Doag was a big girl with blue-black hair and a profile like the Goddess of Liberty on the silver quarter of the period. Her full face rather belied the profile; it was an easy, good-natured face, though with a hint of preoccupation about the dark eyes. Her smile was almost a grin. She had the great gift of health. She radiated it. You couldn't ignore her; you felt her.

Though not a day older than Henry, Corinne was a singer of promise. At Mrs Henderson's musicale, she had managed groups of Schumann, Schubert, Franz and Wolff, an Italian aria or two and some quaint French folk songs with ample evidence of sound training and coaching. Her voice had faults. It was still a little too big for her. It was a contralto without a hollow note in it, firm and strong, with a good upper range. There was in it more than a hint of power. It moved you, even in her cruder moments. Her speaking voice—slow, lazy, strongly sensuous—gave Henry thrills.

She and Henry strolled up the lake, along the bluff through and beyond the oak-clad campus, away up past the lighthouse. She seemed not to mind the increasing heat. She had the careless vitality of a young mountain lion, and the grace.

Henry himself minded no external thing. Corinne Doag was, at the moment, the one person in the world who could help him in his hour of deep trouble. It was not clear how she could help him, but somehow she could. He was blindly sure of it. If he could just impress himself on her, make her forget other men, other interests! He had started well, the night before. Things had gone fine.

He was leading her to a secluded breakwater, between the lighthouse and Pennyweather Point, where, under the clay bluff, the shell of an old boat-house gave you a back as you sat on a gray timber and shielded you at once from morning sun and from the gaze of casual strollers up the beach. Henry knew the place well, had guided various

girls there. Martha had often spoken of it as 'our' breakwater. But no twinge of memory disturbed him now. His nervous intentness on this immediate, rather desperate task of conquering Corinne's sympathy fully occupied his turbulent thoughts.

When they arrived at the spot he was stilted in manner, though atremble within. He ostentatiously took off his coat, spread it for her, overpowering her protests.

It had been thought by a number of girls and by a few of his elders that Henry had charm. He was aware of this, had even resented it; for well he knew that the quality they called charm he could usually turn on and off like water at a faucet.

Now, of all occasions, was the time to turn it on. But he was breathlessly unequal to it.

Perversity seized his tongue. He had seen himself lying easily, not ungracefully beside her, saying (softly) the things she would most like to hear. Speak of her voice, of course. And sing with her (softly) while they idly watched the streaky, sparkling lake and the swooping, creaking gulls above it. But he did none of these. Instead he stood over her, glaring down rather fiercely, and saying nothing at all.

'The shade does feel good,' said she.

Still he groped for words, or for a mental attitude that might result in words. None came. Here she was, at his feet, and he couldn't even speak.

He fell back, in pertubation, on physical display, became the prancing male.

'I like to skip stones,' he managed to say, with husky self-consciousness. He hunted flat stones; threw them hard and far, until his face shone with sweat and a damp spot appeared in his shirt between his shoulders.

To her, 'Better let me hold your glasses,' he responded with an irritable shake of the head.

But such physical violence couldn't go on indefinitely. Not in this heat. He threw less vigorously. He wondered in something of a funk, why he couldn't grasp his opportunity.

He became aware of a sound. A sound that in a more felicitous moment would have thrilled him.

She was singing, softly. Something French, apparently. Once she stopped, and did a phrase over, as if she were practising.

He stole a glance. She wasn't even looking at him. She had sunk back on an elbow, her long frame stretched comfortably out, and seemed to be observing the gulls, rather absently.

Henry came over; sat on a spile; glared at her.

'I skipped that last one seven times,' said he.

She gave him an indulgent little smile, and hummed on.

'She doesn't know I'm here,' he mused, with bitterness. 'I don't count. Nobody wants me.' And added, 'She's selfish.'

Suddenly he broke out, tragically: 'You don't know what I've been through. I wouldn't tell you.'

The tune came to an end. Still watching the gulls, still absently, she asked, after a pause, 'Why not?'

'You'd be like the others. You'd despise me.'

'I doubt that. Mildred Henderson certainly doesn't. You ought to hear her talk about you.'

'She'll be like the others too. My life has been very hard. Living alone with my way to make. Wha'd she say about me?'

'That you're a genius. She can't make out why you've been burying yourself. Working for a little country paper.'

Henry considered this. It was pleasing. But he might have wished for a less impersonal manner in Corinne. She kept following those gulls; speaking most casually, as if it was nothing or little to her what anybody thought about anybody.

Still—it was pleasing. He sat erect. A light glimmered in his eye; glimmered and grew. When he spoke, his voice took on body.

'So she says I'm a genius, eh! Well, maybe it's true. Maybe I am. I'm something. Or there's something in me. Sometimes I feel it. I get all on fire with it. I've done a

few things. I put on *Iolanthe* here. When I was only eighteen. Chorus of fifty, and big soloists. I ran it—drilled 'em——'

'I know. Mildred told me. Mildred really did say you were wonderful.'

'I'll do something else one of these days.'

'I'm sure you will,' she murmured politely.

It was going none too well. She wasn't really interested. He hadn't touched her. Perhaps he had better not talk about himself. He thought it over, and decided another avenue of approach would be better.

'That's an awfully pretty brooch,' he ventured.

She glanced down; touched it with her long fingers. The brooch was a cameo, white on onyx, set in beaded old gold.

'It was a present,' she said. 'From one of the nicest men I ever knew.'

This chilled Henry's heart. His own emotions were none too stable. Out of his first-hand experience he had been able at times, in youthfully masculine company, to expound general views regarding the sex that might be termed cynical. But confronted with the particular girl, the new girl, Henry was an incorrigible idealist.

It had only vaguely occurred to him that Corinne had men friends. It hurt, just to think of it. And presents—things like that, gold in it—the thing had cost many a penny! His bitterness swelled; blackened his thoughts.

'That's it,' these ran now. 'Presents! Money! That's what girls want. Keep you dancing. String you. Make you spend a lot on 'em. That's what they're after!'

The situation was so painful that he got up abruptly and again skipped stones. Until the fact that she let him do it, amused herself practising songs and drinking in the beauty of the place and the day, became quite too much for him.

When he came gloomily over, she remarked:—

'We must be starting back.'

He stood motionless; even let her get up, with an amused expression throw his coat over her arm, and take a few steps along the beach.

'Oh, come on, don't go yet,' he begged. 'Why, we've only just got here.'

'It's a long walk. And it's hot. We'll never get back for dinner if we don't start. I mustn't keep Mildred waiting.'

He thought, 'A lot she'd care if she wanted to be with me!'

He said, 'What you doing to-night?'

'Oh, a couple of Chicago men are coming out.'

'Oh!' It was between a grunt and a snort. He struck out at such a gait that she finally said :—

'If you want to walk at that pace I'm afraid you'll have to walk alone.'

So far a failure. Just as with Humphrey, the situation had given him no opportunity to display his own kind of thing. The picturesque slang phrase had not then been coined; but Henry was in wrong and knew it. It was defeat.

The first faint hope stirred when Mrs Henderson rose from a hammock and came to the top step to clasp his hand. She thought him a genius. Well, she had been accompanist through all those rehearsals for *Iolanthe*. She ought to know.

She asked him now, in her alertly offhand way, to stay to dinner. He accepted instantly.

4

Mildred Henderson was little, slim, quick, with tiny feet and hands. Despite these latter she was the most accomplished pianist in Sunbury. She had snappy little eyes, and a way of smiling quickly and brightly. The Hendersons had lived four or five years in Sunbury. They had no children. They had no servant at this time—but she possessed the gift of getting up pleasant little meals without apparent effort.

After the arrival of Corinne and Henry she disappeared for a few moments, then called them to the dining-room.

'It's really a cold lunch,' she said, as they gathered at

the table—'chicken and salad and things. But there's plenty for you, Henry. Do have some iced tea. I know they starve you at that old boarding-house. We've all had our little term at Mrs Wilcox's.'

'I—I'm not living there any more. I've moved.'

'Not to Mrs Black's?'

'No . . . you see I work with Humphrey Weaver at the *Voice* office and he asked me to come and live with him.'

'With him? And where does he live?'

'Why, just back of the old Parmenter place.'

'But there's nothing back of the Parmenter place!'

'Yes—you see, the barn——'

'Not that old red——'

'Yes. You'd be surprised! Humphrey's put in hard-wood and electricity and things. He's really a wonderful person. Did the wiring himself. And the water pipes. You ought to see his books—and his shop downstairs. He's an inventor, you know. Going to be. Don't you think for a minute that he's just a country editor. That's just while he's feeling his way. Oh, Hump's a smart fellow. Mighty decent of him to take me in that way, too; because he's busy and I know he'd rather live alone. You see, he's quiet and orderly about things, and I—well, I'm different.'

'Offhand,' mused Mrs Henderson, 'I shouldn't suspect Humphrey Weaver of temperament. But tell me—how on earth do you live? Who cooks and cleans up?'

'Well, Hump gets breakfast and—and we'll probably take turns cleaning up.'

'You remember Humphrey Weaver, Corinne,' the little hostess breezed on. 'You've met him. Tall, thin, face wrinkles up when he smiles or speaks to you.' She added, as if musing aloud, 'He *has* nice eyes.' Then, to Henry: 'But do you mean to say that so fascinating a man as that lives undiscovered, right under our noses, in this bourgeois town.'

Henry was rather vague about the meaning of 'bourgeois,' but he nodded gravely.

'You must bring him down here, Henry. I can't imagine what I've been thinking of to overlook him.

Tell you what, we'll have a little rabbit to-morrow night. We four. We'll devote an evening to drawing Mr Humphrey Weaver out of his shell.'

Her quick eyes caught a doubtful look in Corinne's eyes. 'Oh,' she said, 'we did speak of letting Will and Fred take us in town, didn't we?'

Corinne nodded.

It seemed to Henry that he ought to take the situation in hand. As regarded his relations with Humphrey he was sailing under false colours. Among his confused thoughts he sought, gropingly, a way out. The speech he did make was clumsy.

'I don't know whether I could make him come. He likes to read evenings, or work in his shop.'

Mrs Henderson took this in, then let her eyes rest a moment, thoughtfully, on Henry's ingenuous countenance. An intent look crept into her eyes.

'Do you mean that you two sweep and make beds and wash dishes and dust?'

'Well'—Henry's voice faltered—'you see, I haven't been—I just moved over there yesterday afternoon.'

'Hm!' There was a bright flash in Mrs Henderson's eyes. She chuckled abruptly. It was a sharp little chuckle that had the force of an interruption. 'I'd like to see the corners of those rooms. There ought to be some woman that could take care of you.' She turned again on Henry. 'Be sure and bring him down to-morrow. Come in about six for a picnic supper. Or no—let me think——'

Henry's eyes were on Corinne. She was eating now, composedly, like an accomplished feminine fatalist, leaving the disposition of matters to her more aggressive hostess. The food he had eaten rested comfortably on his long ill-treated but still responsive young stomach. His nervous concern of the morning was giving place to a glow of snug inner well-being. Ice-cream was before him now, a heaping plate of it—vanilla, with hot chocolate sauce—and a huge slice of chocolate layer cake. He blessed Mrs Henderson for the rich cream as he let heaping spoonfuls slip down his throat and followed them with healthy bites of the cake. What a jolly little woman she was. No fuss.

Nothing stuck up about her. And he knew she was on his side.

She had sympathy. Even if she hadn't yet heard—when she did hear—it wouldn't matter. She would be on his side; he was sure of it.

Corinne's hair, a loose curl of it, curved down over her ear and part of her cheek. She reached up a long hand and brushed it back. The motion thrilled him. He was quiveringly responsive to the faint down on her cheek, to the slight ebbing and flowing of the colour under her skin, to the whiteness of her temple, the curve of her rather heavy eyebrow, even to the 'waist' she wore—a simple garment, with an open throat and a wide collar that suggested the sea.

Mrs Henderson was talking about something or other, in her brisk way.

Henry only partly heard. He was day-dreaming, weaving an imaginative web of irridescent fancy about the healthy, rather matter-of-fact girl before him. And eating rapidly his second large helping of ice-cream, and his second piece of cake.

Little resentments were still popping up among his thoughts, taunting him. But tentative little hopes were struggling with these now. A sense of power, even, was stirring to life in his breast. This brought new thrills. It was a long, long time since he had felt as he was now beginning to feel. Life had dealt pretty harshly with him these two years. But he wasn't beaten yet. Not even if nice men did give cameo brooches mounted on beaded gold.

He felt in his pocket. Nearly all of the week's pay was there—about eight dollars. It wasn't much. It wouldn't buy gold brooches. Space-reporting on a country weekly at a dollar and a quarter a column, as a means of livelihood, was pretty hard sledding. He would have to scheme out something. There would be seventeen dollars more on the fifteenth from his Uncle Arthur, executor of his mother's estate and guardian to Henry, but that had been mentally pledged to the purchase of necessary summer underwear and things. Still, he might manage somehow. You had

to do a lot for girls, of course. They expected it. Expensive business.

He indulged himself a moment, shading his eyes with one hand and eating steadily on, in a momentary wave of bitterness against well-to-do young men who could lavish money on girls.

Corinne was speaking now, and he was answering. He even laughed at something she said. But the train of his thoughts rumbled steadily on.

After the coffee they all carried out the dishes and washed them. Henry amused them by wearing a full-length kitchen apron. Corinne tied the strings around his waist. He found an excuse to reach back, and for an instant his hands covered hers. She laughed a little. He danced about the kitchen and sang comic songs as he wiped dishes and took them to the china closet in the butler's pantry.

This chore finished, they went to the living-room.

Mrs Henderson said: 'Oh, Corinne, you must hear Henry sing "When Britain Really Ruled" from *Iolanthe*.'

She found the score and played for him. He sang lustily, all three verses.

'Too much dinner,' he remarked, beaming with pleasure, at the close. 'Voice is rotten.'

'It's a good organ,' said Corinne. 'You ought to work at it.'

'Perfect shame he won't study,' said Mrs Henderson.

Henry found *The Geisha* on the piano.

'Come on, Corinne,' he cried. 'Do the "Jewel of Asia." Mrs Henderson'll transpose it.'

Corinne leaned carelessly against the piano and sang the pleasant little melody with an ease and a steady flow of tone that brought a shine to Henry's eyes. He had to hide it, dropping on the big couch and resting his head on his hand. He could look nowhere but at her. He ordered her to sing 'The Amorous Goldfish.'

She fell into the spirit of it, and moved away from the piano, looking provocatively at Henry, gesturing, making an audience of him. She even danced a few steps at the end.

Henry sprang up. The power was upon him. Obstacles, difficulties, the little scene with Humphrey, while not forgotten, were swept aside. He was irresistible.

'Tell you what,' he said gaily, with supreme ease—'we'll send those Chicago men a box of poisoned candy to-morrow, and—oh, yes we will!—and then we'll have a party at the rooms. You'll be chaperon, Mrs Henderson and Hump'll cook things in the chafing dish, and——'

'What a perfectly lovely idea!' said Mrs Henderson in a surprisingly calm voice. 'I'll bring the cold chicken, and a vegetable salad. . . .'

Henry watched Corinne.

For an instant—she was rummaging through the music—her eyes met his. 'It'll be fun,' she said.

Henry felt a shock as if he had plunged unexpectedly, headlong, into ice-water; then a glow.

He was a daring soul. They didn't understand him in Sunbury. He had temperament, a Bohemian nature. The thing was, he'd wasted two years trying to make another sort of himself. Kept account of every penny in a red book! All that! Book was in his pocket now.

He decided to tear it up. He wouldn't be a coward another day. That plodding self-discipline hadn't got him anywhere. Now really, had it?

Little inner voices were protesting weakly. People might find out about it. Have to be pretty quiet. And keep the shades down. It wouldn't do for the folks in the parsonage, across the alley, to know that Mrs Arthur V. Henderson and her guest were in the Parmenter barn. Have to find some tactful way of suggesting that they come after dark . . .

As if she could read his thoughts, Mrs Henderson remarked calmly: 'You come for us, Henry. Say about eight.'

Still the little voices of doubt and confusion. Even of fear. He mentally shouted them down; fixing his eyes on the disturbingly radiant Corinne, then glancing for moral support at the really pretty little Mrs Henderson who gave out such a reassuring air of knowing precisely

what she was about, of being altogether in the right. Funny, knowing her all these years, he hadn't realised she was so nice!

He had turned defeat into victory. Single-handed. Will and Fred could go sit on the Wells Street bridge and eat bananas. He had settled *their* hash.

5

To this lofty mood there came, promptly, an opposite and fully equal reaction.

Difficulties having arisen in connection with the problem of breaking the news to Humphrey, he couldn't very well go back to the rooms.

The thing would have to be put right before Humphrey. He decided to think it over. That was the idea—think it over. Humphrey would be eating his supper, if not at the rooms, then at Stanley's little restaurant on Simpson Street. So he could hardly go to Stanley's. There was another little lunch room down by the tracks, but Humphrey had been known to go there. And of course it was impossible to return for a transient meal to Mrs Wilcox. For one thing, the student waiters would be off and Mamie Wilcox on duty in the dining-room. He didn't want Mamie back in his life. Not if he could help it. He even went so far as to wonder, with a paralysing sense of helplessness in certain conceivable contingencies, if he *could* help it . . . So instead of eating supper he sat on a breakwater, alone, unobserved, while the golden sunset glow faded from lake and sky and darkness claimed him for her own.

Later, handkerchief over face, rushing and pawing his way through the myriads of sand-flies that swarmed about each corner light, he walked into the neighbourhood of Martha Caldwell's house. He walked back and forth for a time on the other side of the street, and stood motionless by trees. He found the situation trying, as he didn't know why he had come, whether he wanted to see Martha or what he could say to her.

He could hear voices from the porch. And he thought he could see one white dress.

Then, because it seemed to be the next best thing to do, he crossed over and mounted the familiar front steps.

He found himself touching the non-committal hand of James B. Merchant, Jr., who carried the talk along glibly, ignoring the gloomy youth with the glasses and the tiny moustache who sat in a shadow and sulked. Finally, after deliberately, boldly arranging a driving party of two for Monday evening, the cotillion leader left.

Martha, when he had disappeared beyond the swirling, illuminated sand-flies at the corner, settled back in her chair and stared, silent, at the maples.

Henry struggled for speech.

'Martha, look here,' came from him, in a tired voice, 'you've cut me dead. Twice. Now it seems to me——'

'I don't want to talk about that,' said Martha.

'But it isn't fair not to——'

'Please don't try to tell me that you weren't at Hoffmann's with that horrid girl.'

'I'm not trying to. But——'

'You took her there, didn't you?'

'Yes, but she——'

'She didn't make you. You knew her pretty well. While you were going with me, too.'

'Oh, well,' he muttered. Then, 'Thunder! If you're just determined not to be fair——'

'I won't let you say that to me.'

The snap in her voice stung him.

'You're not fair! You won't even let me talk!'

'What earthly good is talk!'

'Oh, if you're going to take that attitude——'

She rose. So did he.

'I can't and I won't talk about a thing like that,' she said quickly, unevenly.

'Then I suppose I'd better go,' said he, standing motionless.

She made no reply.

They stood and stood there. Across the street, at B. F. Jones's, a porch full of young people were singing

Louisiana Lou. Henry, out of sheer nervousness, hummed it with them; then caught himself and turned to the steps.

'Well,' he remarked listlessly, 'I'll say good-night, then.'

Still she was silent. He lingered, but she gave him no help. He hadn't believed that she could be as angry as this. He waited and waited. He even felt and weighed the impulses to go right to her and make her sit in the hammock with him and bring back something of the old-time feeling.

But he found himself moving off down the steps and heading for the yellow cloud at the corner.

He hated the sand-flies. Their dead bodies formed a soft crunchy carpet on pavement and sidewalk. You couldn't escape them. They came for a week or two in June. They were less than an inch long, pale yellow with gauzy wings. They had neither sting nor pincers. They overwhelmed these lake towns by their mere numbers. Down by the bright lights on Simpson Street they literally covered everything. You couldn't see through a square inch of Donovan's wide plateglass front. Mornings it was sometimes necessary to clear the sidewalks with shovels.

It was two or three hours later when Henry crept cautiously into Humphrey's shop and ascended the stairs.

Humphrey had left lights for him. He was awake, too; there was a crack of light at the bottom of his bedroom door. But the door was shut tight.

Henry put out all the lights and shut himself in his own disorderly room.

He stood for a time looking at the mess; everything he owned, strewed about on chairs, table and floor. Everything where it had fallen.

He considered finishing unpacking the suit-case. Pushed it with his foot.

'Just have to get at these things,' he muttered aloud. 'Make a job of it. Do it the first thing to-morrow, before I go to the office.'

Then he dug out the box of books that stood beside the bed, the volume entitled *Will Power and Self Mastery.*

He sat on the bed for an hour, reading one or another of the vehemently pithy sentences, then gazing at the wall, knitting his brows, and mumbling the words over and over until the small meaning they had ever possessed was lost.

6

He came almost stealthily into the office of *The Weekly Voice of Sunbury* on the Monday morning. He had not fallen really asleep until the small hours. When he awoke, Humphrey was long gone and the breakfast things stood waiting on the centre table. And there they were now. He hadn't so much as rinsed them in the sink.

Humphrey sat behind his roll-top desk, back of the railing. Old Mr Boice, the proprietor, was at his own desk, out in front. At the first glimpse of his massive head and shoulders with the heavy white whiskers falling down on his shirt front, Henry, hesitating on the sill, gave a little quick sigh of relief. He let himself, moving with the self-consciousness that somewhat resembled dignity, through the gate in the railing and took his chair at the inkstained pine table that served him for a desk.

He felt Humphrey's eyes on him, and said 'Good-morning!' stiffly, without looking round. He looked through the papers on the table for he knew not what; snatched at a heap of copy paper, bit his pencil and made a business of writing nothing whatever.

At eleven Mr Boice, who was also postmaster, lumbered out and along Simpson Street toward the post office. Henry, discovering himself alone with Humphrey, rushed, muttering, to the press room and engaged Jim Smith, the foreman, in talk which apparently made it necessary for that blonde little man, whose bare forearms were elaborately tattooed and who chewed tobacco, to come in, sit on Henry's table, and talk further.

Noon came.

Humphrey pushed back his chair, tapped on the edge of his desk, and thoughtfully wrinkled his long face. The natural thing was for Henry to come along with him for

lunch at Stanley's. He didn't mind for himself. It was quite as pleasant to eat alone. In the present circumstances, more pleasant. It was awkward.

He got up; stood a moment.

He could feel the boy there, bending over proofs of the programmes for the Commencement 'recital' of the Music School, pencil poised, motionless, almost inert.

Suddenly Henry muttered again, sprang up, rushed to the press room, proof in hand; and Humphrey went to lunch alone.

Henry did not appear again at the office. This was not unusual. Monday was a slack day, and much of Henry's work consisted in scouting along Simpson Street, looking up new real estate permits at the village office, new volumes at the library and other small matters.

The unusual thing was the note on Humphrey's desk. Henry had put it on top of his papers and weighted it down conspicuously with the red ink bottle.

'I've had to ask Mrs Henderson and Corinne Doag to the rooms to-night for a little party. I'll bring them about eight.' Pinned to the paper was a five-dollar bank-note.

At supper-time, Humphrey, eating alone in Stanley's, saw a familiar figure outside the wide front window. It was Henry, dressed in his newest white ducks, his blue coat newly pressed (while he waited, at the Swede tailor's down the street), standing stiffly on the curb.

Occasionally he glanced around, peering into the restaurant.

The light was failing in the rear of the store. Mrs Stanley came from her desk by the door and lighted two gas-jets.

Henry again glanced around. He saw Humphrey and knew that Humphrey saw him.

A youth on a bicycle paused at the curb.

Through the screen door Humphrey heard this conversation :—

'Hallo, Hen !'

'Hallo, Al !'

'Doing anything after?'

'Why—yeah. Got a date.'

And as the other youth rode off, Henry glanced around once more, nervously.

He was carrying the bamboo stick he affected. He twirled this for a moment, and then wandered out of view.

But soon he reappeared, entered the restaurant and marched straight back to Humphrey's table. His sensitive lips were compressed.

He said, 'Hallo, Hump!' and with only a moment's hesitation took the chair opposite.

Humphrey buried his nose in his coffee cup.

Henry cleared his throat, twice; then, in a husky, weak voice, remarked :—

'Get my note?'

There was a painfully long silence.

'Yes,' Humphrey replied then, 'I did.' And went at the pie.

Henry picked up a corner of the threadbare table-cloth and twisted it. He had been pale, but colour was coming now, richly.

'Well,' he mumbled, 'I s'pose we've gotta say something about it.'

'Not necessary,' Humphrey observed briskly.

'Well, but—we'll have to plan——'

'Not at all.'

'You mean—you——' Henry's voice broke and faltered.

'I mean——' Humphrey's voice was clear, sharp.

'Ssh! Not so loud, Hump.'

'I mean that since you've done this extraordinary thing without so much as consulting me, I will see it through. I don't want you for one minute to think that I like it. God knows what it's going to mean—having women running in there! My privacy was the only thing I had. You've chosen to wreck it without a by-your-leave. I'll be ready at eight. And I'll see that the door of your room is shut.'

With which he rose, handed his ticket to Mrs Stanley to be punched, and left the restaurant.

Henry walked the streets, through gathering clouds of sand-flies, until it was time to call at Mrs Henderson's.

7

They stood on the threshold.

'This is the shop,' Henry explained, 'where Hump works.'

'How perfectly fascinating!' exclaimed Mrs Henderson. Her quick eyes took in lathes, kites, models of gliders, tools. 'Bring him straight down here. I won't stir from this room till he's explained everything.'

'Hump!' called Henry, with austere politeness, up the stairway: 'Would you mind coming down?'

He came—tall, stooping under the low lintel, in spotless white, distant in manner, but courteous, firmly courteous.

Mrs Henderson, prowling about, lifted a wheel in a frame.

'What on earth is this thing?' she asked.

'A gyroscope.'

'What do you do with it?'

Humphrey wound a long twine about the handle and set the wheel spinning like a top.

'Hold it by the handle,' said he. 'Now try to wave it around.'

The apparently simple machine swung itself back to the horizontal with a jerk so violent that Mrs Henderson nearly lost her footing. Humphrey, with evident hesitation, caught her elbow and steadied her. She turned her eyes up to his, laughing, all interest.

'Sit right down in that chair and explain it to me,' she cried. 'How on earth did it do that? It's uncanny.' And she seated herself on a work-bench, with a light little spring.

When Henry showed Corinne up the stairs, Humphrey was talking with an eager interest that had not before been evident in him. And Mrs Henderson was listening, interrupting him where his easy flow of scientific terms and mechanical axioms ran too fast for her.

Henry's pulse beat faster. Suddenly the pleasantly arranged old barn looked, felt different. Charm had entered it. And the exciting possibility of fellowship—

a daring fellowship. He was up in the living-room now. Corinne was moving lazily, comfortably about, humming a song by the sensational new Richard Strauss who was upsetting all settled musical tradition just then, and prying into corners and shelves. She wore a light, shimmery, silky dress that gave out a faint odour of violets. It drugged Henry, that odour. He felt for the first time as if he belonged in these rooms himself.

Corinne found the kitchen cupboard, and exclaimed.

'Mildred!' she called down the stairs, in her rich drawling voice, 'come right up here—the cutest thing!'

To which Mildred Henderson coolly replied:—

'Don't bother me with cute things now. Play with Henry and keep quiet.'

And Humphrey's voice droned on down there.

Henry dropped on the piano stool. Corinne was certainly less indifferent. A little.

He struck chords; all he knew. He hummed a phrase of the Colonel's song in *Patience*.

Corinne drew a chair to the end of the keyboard and settled herself comfortably. 'Sing something,' she said. 'I love your voice.'

'It's no good,' said he, flushing with delight.

Surely her interest was growing. He added:—

'I'd a lot rather hear you.' But then, when she smilingly shook her head, promptly broke into—

'If you want a receipt for that popular mystery
Known to the world as a Heavy Dragoon,
Take all the remarkable people of history,
Rattle them off to a popular tune.'

It is the trickiest and most brilliant patter song ever written, I think, not even excepting the Major General's song in *The Pirates*. Which, by the way, Henry sang next.

'How on earth can you remember all those words!' Corinne murmured. 'And the way you get your tongue around them. I could never do it.'

She tried it, with him; but broke down with laughter.

'I know hundreds of 'em,' he said expansively, and sang on.

It was an opportunity he had not foreseen during this dreadful day. But here it was, and he seized it. The stage was set for his kind of things; all at once, as if by the merest accident. For the first time since the awkward Sunday morning on the beach he was able to turn on full the faucet that controlled his 'charm.' And he turned it on full. He had parlour tricks. Out of amateur opera experience he had picked up a superficial knack at comedy dancing. He did all he knew. He taught an absurd little team song and dance to Corinne, with Mrs Henderson (who had at last come up) improvising at the piano. And Corinne, flushed and pretty, clung to his hand and laughed herself speechless. Once in her desperate confusion over the steps she sank to the floor and sat in a merry heap until Henry lifted her up. Then Henry imitated Frank Daniels singing 'The man with an elephant on his hands,' and H. C. Barnabee singing *The Sheriff of Nottingham*, and De Wolf Hopper doing *Casey at the Bat*. All were clever bits; the 'Casey' exceptionally so. They applauded him. Even Humphrey, silent now, leaning on an end of the piano, watching Mrs Henderson's flashing little hands, clapped a little.

Once Humphrey went rather moodily to a window and peered out.

Mrs Henderson followed him; slipped her hand through his arm; asked quietly, 'Who lives across the alley?'

'It's the Presbyterian parsonage,' he replied, slightly grim.

It was after midnight when they set out, whispering, giggling a little in the alley, for Chestnut Avenue.

'These sand-flies are fierce,' said Henry. 'You girls better take our handkerchiefs.'

They circled on lawns to avoid the swirling, crunching, softly suffocating clouds of insects. Nearer the lake it grew worse. At the corner of Chestnut and Simpson they stopped short. Mrs Henderson, pressing the handkerchief to her face, clung in humorous helplessness to Humphrey's arm.

He looked down at her. Suddenly he stooped, gathered her up in his arms as if she were a child, and carried her clear through the plague into the shadows of Chestnut Avenue.

Henry, running with Corinne pressing close on his arm, caught a glimpse of his face. The expression on it added a touch of alarm to the pæan of joy in Henry's brain.

They stepped within the Henderson screen door to say good-night.

'Let's do something to-morrow night—walk or go biking or row on the lake,' said Mrs Henderson. 'You two had better come down for dinner. Any time after six.'

'How about you?' Henry whispered to Corinne. 'Do you want me to come . . . Will and Fred . . .'

Corinne's firm long hand slipped for a moment into his. He gripped it. The pressure was returned.

'Don't be silly!' she breathed, close to his ear.

8

The sand-flies served as an excuse for silence between Humphrey and Henry on the walk back. Nevertheless, the silence was awkward. It held until they were up in the curiously, hauntingly empty living-room.

Humphrey scraped and lighted his pipe.

Henry, rather surprisingly unhappy again, was moving toward a certain closed door.

'Tell me,' said Humphrey gruffly, slowly, 'where is Mister Arthur V. Henderson?'

'He travels for the Camman Company, reapers and binders and ploughs.'

Humphrey very deliberately lighted his pipe.

Henry moved on toward the closed door. Emotions were stirring uncomfortably within him. And conflicting impulses. Suddenly he shot out a muffled 'Good-night,' and entered the bedroom, shutting the door after him.

An hour later Humphrey—a gaunt figure in nightgown and slippers, pipe in mouth—tapped at that door.

Henry, only half undressed, flushed of face, dripping with sweat, quickly opened it.

Humphrey looked down in surprise at a fully packed trunk and suit-case and a heap of bundles tied with odd bits of twine—sofa cushions, old clothes, what not.

'What's all this?' Humphrey waved his pipe.

'Well—I just thought I'd go in the morning.'

'Don't be a dam' fool.'

'But—but'—Henry threw out protesting hands—'I know I'm no good at all these fussy things. I'd just spoil your——'

The pipe waved again. 'That's all disposed of, Hen.' A somewhat wry smile wrinkled the long face. 'Mildred Henderson's running it, apparently. There's a certain Mrs Olson who is to come in mornings and clean up. And—oh yes, I've got a lot of change for you. Your share was only eight-five cents.'

There was a long silence. Henry looked at his feet; moved one of them slowly about on the floor.

'We're different kinds,' said Humphrey. 'About as different as they make 'em. But that, in itself, isn't a bad thing.'

He thrust out his hand.

Henry clasped it; gulped down an all but uncontrollable uprush of feeling; looked down again.

Humphrey stalked back to his room.

Thus began the odd partnership of Weaver and Calverly. Though is not every partnership a little odd?

III

THE STIMULANT

I

Miss Wombast looked up from her desk in the Sunbury Public Library and beheld Henry Calverly, 3rd. Then with a slight fluttering of her pale, blue-veined eyelids and a compression of her thin lips she looked down again and in a neat practised librarian's hand finished printing out a title on the catalogue card before her.

For Henry Calverly was faintly disconcerting to her. Though it was only eleven o'clock, and a Tuesday, he was attired in blue serge coat, snow white trousers and (could she have seen through the desk) white stockings and shoes. His white *négligé* shirt was decorated at the neck with a 'four-in-hand' of shimmering foulard, blue and green. In his left hand was a rolled-up creamy-white felt hat and the crook of a thin bamboo stick. With his right he fussed at the fringe on his upper lip, which was somewhat nearer the moustache stage than it had been last week. Behind his nose glasses and their pendant silk cord his face was sober; the gray-blue eyes that (Miss Wombast knew) could blaze with primal energy were gloomy, or at least tired; there was a furrow between his blond eyebrows. He had the air of a youth who wants earnestly to concentrate without knowing quite how.

Miss Wombast was a distinctly 'literary' person. She read Meredith, Balzac, De Maupassant, Flaubert, Zola, and Howells. She was living her way into the developing later manner of Henry James. She talked, on occasion, with an icy enthusiasm that many honest folk found irritating, of Stevenson's style and of Walter Pater.

It was Miss Wombast's habit to look in her books for

complete identification of the living characters she met. She studied all of them, coolly, critically, at boarding-house and library. Naturally, when a living individual refused to take his place among her gallery of book types, she was puzzled. One such was Henry Calverly.

She had known something of his checkered career in high school, where he had directed the glee club, founded and edited *The Boys' Journal*, written a rather bright one-act play for the junior class. Indeed the village in general had been mildly aware of Henry. He had stood out, and Miss Wombast herself had sung a modest alto in the *Iolanthe* chorus, two years back, under Henry's direction and had found him impersonally, ingenuously masterful and a subtly pleasing factor in her thought-world. He had made a success of that mob. The big men of the village gave him a dinner and a purse of gold. After all of which, his mother had died, he had run, apparently, through his gifts and his earnings, and settled down to a curiously petty reporting job, trotting up and down Simpson Street collecting useless little items for *The Weekly Voice of Sunbury*. Other young fellows of twenty either went to college or started laying the foundations of a regular job in Chicago. Those that amounted to anything. You could see pretty plainly ahead of each his proper line of development. Yet here was Henry, who *had* stood out, working half-heartedly at the sort of job you associated with the off-time of poor students, dressing altogether too conspicuously, wasting hours—daytimes, when a young fellow ought to be working—with this girl and that. For a long time it had been the Caldwell girl. Lately she had seen him with that strikingly pretty but, she felt, rather 'physical' young singer who was visiting the gifted but whispered-about Mrs Arthur V. Henderson, of Lower Chestnut Avenue. Name of Doge, or Doag, or something like that.

Henry himself had been whispered about. Very recently. He had been seen at Hoffmann's Garden, up the shore, with a vulgar young woman in extremely tight bloomers. Of the working girl type. Had her out on a tandem. Drinking beer.

So it was, unable to forget those secretly stirring *Iolanthe* days, that Miss Wombast had looked about among her book types for a key to Henry, but without success. He didn't appear to be in De Maupassant. Nor in Balzac. In Meredith and James there was no one who said 'Yeah' and 'Gotta' and spoke with the crude if honest throat 'r' of the Middle West and went with nice girls and vulgar girls and carried that silly cane and wore the sillier moustache; who had, or had had, gifts of creation and command, yet now, month in, month out, hung about Donovan's soda fountain; who never smoked and, apart from the Hoffmann's Garden incident, wasn't known to drink; and who, when you faced him, despite the massed evidence, gave out an impression of earnest endeavour. Even of moral purpose.

Had she known him better Miss Wombast would have found herself the more puzzled. For Miss Wombast, despite her rather complicated reading, still clung in some measure to the moralistic teachings of her youth, believing that people either had what she thought of as character or else didn't have it, that people were either industrious or lazy, bright or stupid, vulgar or nice. Therefore the fact that Henry, while still wrecking his stomach with fountain drinks and (a recently acquired habit) with lemon meringue pie between meals, had not touched candy for two years—not a chocolate cream, not even a gum drop!—and this by sheer force of character, would have been confusing.

And to read his thoughts, as he stood there before her desk, would have carried her confusion on into bewilderment.

Mostly these thoughts had to do with money, and bordered on the desperate. Tentative little schemes for getting money—even a few dollars—were forming and dissolving rapidly in his mind.

He was concerned because his sudden little flirtation with Corinne Doag, after a flashing start, had lost its glow. Only the preceding evening. He hadn't held her interest. The thrill had gone. Which plunged him into moods and brought to his always unruly tongue the sarcastic words

that made matters worse. He was lunching down there to-day—he and Humphrey—and dreaded it, with moments of a rather futile, flickering hope. Deep intuition informed him that the one sure solution was money. You couldn't get on with a girl without it. Just about so far, then things dragged. And this, of course, brought him around the circle, back to the main topic.

He was thinking about his clothes. They, at least, should move Corinne. Along with the moustache, the cane, the cord on his glasses. He didn't see how people could help being a little impressed. Miss Wombast, even, who didn't matter. It seemed to him that she *was* impressed.

He was thinking about Martha Caldwell. She was pretty frankly going with James B. Merchant, Jr., now. Henry was jealous of James B. Merchant, Jr. And about Martha his thoughts hovered with a tinge of romantic sadness. He would like her to see him to-day, in these clothes, with his moustache and cane.

He was wondering, with the dread that the prospect of mental effort always roused in him, how on earth he was ever to write three whole columns about the Annual Business Men's Picnic of the preceding afternoon. Describing in humorous yet friendly detail the three-legged race, the ball game between the fats and the leans, the dinner in the grove, the concert by Foote's full band of twenty pieces, the purse given to Charlie Waterhouse as the most popular man on Simpson Street. He had a thick wad of notes up at the rooms, but his heart was not in the laborious task of expanding them. He knew precisely what old man Boice expected of him—plenty of 'personal mention' for all the advertisers, giving space for space. Each day that he put it off would make the task harder. If he didn't have the complete story in by Thursday night, Humphrey would skin him alive; yet here it was Wednesday morning, and he was planning to spend as much of the day as possible with the increasingly unresponsive Corinne. Life was difficult!

He was aware of a morbid craving in his digestive tract. He decided to get an ice-cream soda on the way back to

the office. He would have liked about half a pound of chocolate creams. The Italian kind, with all the sweet in the white part. But here character intervened.

A corner of his mind dwelt unceasingly on queer difficult feelings that came. These had flared out in the unpleasant incident of Mamie Wilcox and the tandem; and again in the present flirtation with Corinne. In a way that he found perplexing, this stir of emotion was related to his gifts. He couldn't let one go without the other. There had been moments—in the old days—when a feeling of power had surged through him. It was a wonderful, irresistible feeling. Riding that wave, he was equal to anything. But it had frightened him. The memory of it frightened him now. He had put *Iolanthe* through, it was true, but he had also nearly eloped with Ernestine Lambert. He had completely lost his head—debts, everything!

Yes, it was as well that Miss Wombast couldn't read his thoughts. She wouldn't have known how to interpret them. She hadn't the capacity to understand the wide swift stream of feeling down which an imaginative boy floats all but rudderless into manhood. She couldn't know of his pitifully inadequate little attempts to shape a course, to catch this breeze and that, even to square around and breast the current of life.

Henry said politely:—

'Good-morning, Miss Wombast. I just looked in for the notes of new books.'

'Oh,' she replied quickly. 'I'm sorry you troubled. Mr Boice asked me to mail it to the office at the end of the month. I just sent it—this morning.'

She saw his face fall. He mumbled something that sounded like, 'Oh—all right! Doesn't matter.' For a moment he stood waving his stick in jerky, aimless little circles. Then went off down the stairs.

2

Emerging from Donovan's drug store Henry encountered the ponderous person of old Boice—six feet an inch and a

half, head sunk a little between the shoulders, thick yellowish-white whiskers waving down over a black bow tie and a spotted, roundly protruding vest, a heavy old watch chain with insignia of a fraternal order hanging as a charm; inscrutable, washed-out blue eyes in a deeply lined but nearly expressionless face.

Henry stopped short; stared at his employer.

Mr Boice did not stop. But as he moved deliberately by, his faded eyes took in every detail of Henry's not unremarkable personal appearance.

Henry was thinking: 'Old crook. Wish I had a paper of my own here and I'd get back at him. Run him out of town, that's what!' And after he had nodded and rushed by, his colouring mounting: 'Like to know why I should work my head off just to make money for *him*. No sense in that!'

Henry came moodily into the *Voice* office, dropped down at his inkstained, littered table behind the railing, and sighed twice. He picked up a pencil and fell to outlining ink spots.

The sighs were directed at Humphrey, who sat bent over his desk, cob pipe in mouth, writing very rapidly. 'He's got wonderful concentration,' thought Henry, his mind wandering a brief moment from his unhappy self.

Humphrey spoke without looking up. 'Don't let that Business Men's Picnic get away from you, Hen. Really ought to be getting it in type now. Two compositors loafing out there.'

Henry sighed again; let his pencil fall on the table; gazed heavily, helplessly at the wall.

'Old man say anything to you about the "Library Notes"?'

Humphrey glanced up and removed his pipe. His swarthy long face wrinkled thoughtfully. 'Yes. Just now. He's going to have Miss Wombast send 'em in direct every month.'

'And I don't have 'em any more.'

Humphrey considered this fact. 'It doesn't amount to very much, Hen.'

'Oh, no—works out about sixty cents to a dollar. It ain't that altogether—it's the principle. I'm getting tired of it!'

The press-room door was ajar, Humphrey reached out and closed it.

Henry raised his voice; got out of his chair and sat on the edge of the table. His eyes brightened sharply. Emotion crept into his voice and shook it a little.

'Do you know what's he done to me—that old double-face? Took me in here two years ago at eight a week with a promise of nine if I suited. Well, I did suit. But did I get the nine? Not until I'd rowed and begged for seven months. A year of that, a lot more work—You know! "Club Notes," this library stuff, "Real Estate Happenings," "Along Simpson Street," reading proof—'

Humphrey slowly nodded as he smoked.

'—And I asked for ten a week. Would he give it? No! I knew I was worth more than that, so I offered to take space rates instead. Then what does he do? You know, Hump. Been clipping me off, one thing after another, and piling on the proof and the office work. Here's one thing more gone to-day. Last week my string was exactly seven dollars and forty-six cents. Darn it, it ain't fair! I can't *live!* I won't stand it. Gotta be ten a week or I—I'll find out why. Show-down.'

He rushed to the door. Then, as if his little flare of indignation had burnt out, lingered there, knitting his brows and looking up and down the street and across at the long veranda of the Sunbury House, where people sat in a row in yellow rocking chairs.

Humphrey smoked and considered him. After a little he remarked quietly:—

'Look here, Hen, I don't like it any more than you do. I've seen what he was doing. I've tried to forestall him once or twice——'

'I know it, Hump.' Henry turned. He was quite listless now. 'He's a tricky old fox. If I only knew of something else I could do—or that we could do together——'

'But—this was what I was going to say—no matter how we feel, I'm going to be really in trouble if I don't

get that picnic story pretty soon. Mr Boice asked about it this morning.'

Henry leaned against Mr Boice's desk, up by the window; dropped his chin into one hand.

'I'll do it, Hump. This afternoon. Or to-night. We're going down to Mildred's this noon, of course.'

'That's part of what's bothering me. God knows how soon after that you'll break away from Corinne.'

'Pretty darn soon,' remarked Henry sullenly, 'the way things are going now. . . . I'll get at it, Hump. Honest I will. But right now'—he moved a hand weakly through the air—'I just couldn't. You don't know how I feel. I *couldn't!*'

'Where you going now?'

'I don't know.' The hand moved again. 'Walk around. Gotta be by myself. Sorta think it out. This is one of the days . . . I've been thinking—be twenty-one in November. *Then* I'll show him, and all the rest of 'em. Have a little money then. I'll show this hypocritical old town a few things—a few things. . . .'

His voice died to a mumble. He felt with limp fingers at his moustache.

'I'll be ready quarter or twenty minutes past twelve,' Humphrey called after him as he moved mournfully out to the street.

3

Mr Boice moved heavily along, inclining his massive head, without a smile, to this acquaintance and that, and turned in at Schultz and Schwartz's.

The spectacle of Henry Calverly—in spotless white and blue, with the moustache, and the stick—had irritated him. Deeply. A boy who couldn't earn eight dollars a week parading Simpson Street in that rig, on a week-day morning! He felt strongly that Henry had no business sticking out that way, above the village level. Hitting you in the eyes. Young Jenkins was bad enough, but at least his father had the money. Real money. And could let his son waste it if he chose. But a conceited young

chump like Henry Calverly! Ought to be chucked into a factory somewhere. Stoke a furnace. Carry boxes. Work with his hands. Get down to brass tacks and see if he had any stuff in him. Doubtful.

Mr Boice made a low sound, a wheezy sound between a grunt and a hum, as he handed his hat to the black, muscular, bullet-headed, grinning Pinkie Potter, who specialised in hats and shoes in Sunbury's leading barber shop.

He made another sound that was quite a grunt as he sank into the red plush barber chair of Heinie Schultz. His massive frame was clumsy, and the twinges of lumbago, varied by touches of neuritis, that had come steadily upon him since middle life, added to the difficulties of moving it about. He always made these sounds. He would stop on the street, take your hand non-committally in his huge, rather limp paw, and grunt before he spoke, between phrases, and when moving away.

Heinie Schultz, who was straw-coloured, thin, listlessly patient (Bill Schwartz was the noisy fat one), knew that the thick, yellowish gray hair was to be cut round in the back and the neck shaved beneath it. The beard was to be trimmed delicately, reverently—'not cut, just the rags taken off'—and combed out. Heinie had attended to this hair and beard for sixteen years.

'Heard a good one,' murmured Heinie, close to his patron's ear. 'There was a bride and groom got on the sleeping car up to Duluth——'

A thin man of about thirty-five entered the shop, tossed his hat to Pinkie, and dropped into Bill Schwartz's chair next the window. The new-comer had straight brown hair, worn a little long over ears and collar. His face was freckled, a little pinched, nervously alert. Behind his gold rimmed spectacles his small sharp eyes appeared to be darting this way and that, keen, penetrating through the ordinary comfortable surfaces of life.

This was Robert A. McGibbon, editor and proprietor of the *Sunbury Weekly Gleaner*. He had appeared in the village hardly six months back with a little money—enough, at least, to buy the presses, give a little for good will, assume the rent and the few business debts that

Nicholas Simms Godfrey had been able to contract before his health broke, and to pay his own board at the Wombasts' on Filbert Avenue. His appearance in local journalism had created a new tension in the village and his appearance now in the barber shop created tension there. Heinie's vulgar little anecdote froze on his lips. Mr Boice, impassive, heavily deliberate, after one glimpse of the fellow in the long mirror before him, lay back in the chair, gazed straight upward at the fly-specked ceiling.

Mr Boice, when face to face with Robert A. McGibbon on the street, inclined his head to him as to others. But up and down the street his barely expressed disapproval of the man was felt to have a root in feelings and traditions infinitely deeper than the mere natural antagonism to a fresh competitor in the local field.

For McGibbon was—the term was a new one that had caught the popular imagination and was worming swiftly into the American language—a yellow journalist. He had worked, he boasted openly, on a sensationally new daily in New York. In the once staid old *Gleaner* he used bold-faced headlines, touched with irritating acumen on scandal, assailed the ruling political triumvirate, and made the paper generally fascinating as well as disturbing. As a result, he was picking up subscribers rapidly. Advertising, of course, was another matter. And Boice had all the village and county printing.

The political triumvirate mentioned above was composed of Boice himself, Charles H. Waterhouse, town treasurer, and Mr Weston of the Sunbury National Bank. For a decade their rule had not been questioned along the street. The other really prominent men of Sunbury all had their business interests in Chicago, and at that time used the village merely for sleeping and as a point of departure for the very new golf links. Such men, I mean, as B. L. Ames, John W. MacLouden, William B. Snow, and J. E. Jenkins.

The experience of withstanding vulgar attacks was new to the triumvirate. (McGibbon referred to them always as the 'Old Cinch.') The *Gleaner* had come out for annexation to Chicago. It demanded an audit of Charlie

Waterhouse's town accounts by a new, politically disinterested group. It accused the bank of withholding proper support from men of whom old Boice disapproved. It demanded a share of the village printing.

The 'Old Cinch' were taking these attacks in silence, as beneath their notice. They took pains, however, in casual mention of the new force in town, to refer to him always as a 'Democrat.' This damned him with many. He called himself an 'Independent.' Which amused Charlie Waterhouse greatly. Everybody knew that a man who wasn't a decent Republican had to be a Democrat. In the nature of things.

And they were waiting for his money and his energy to give out. Giving him, as Charlie Waterhouse jovially put it, the rope to hang himself with.

Bill Schwartz took McGibbon's spectacles, tucked the towel around his scrawny neck, lathered chin and cheeks, and seizing his head firmly in a strong right hand turned it sidewise on the head-rest.

McGibbon lay there a moment, studying the yellowish-white whiskers that waved upward above the towels in the next chair. Bill stropped his razor.

'How are you, Mr Boice?' McGibbon observed, quite cheerfully.

Mr Boice made a sound, raised his head an inch. Heinie promptly pushed it down.

'Quite a story you had last week about the musicale at Mrs Arthur V. Henderson's.'

Mr Boice lay motionless. What was up! Distinctly odd that either journal should be mentioned between them. Bad taste. He made another sound.

'Who wrote it?'

No answer.

'Henry Calverly?'

A grunt.

'Thought so!' McGibbon chuckled.

Mr Boice twisted his head around, trying to see the fellow in the mirror. Heinie pulled it back.

'Got it here. Hand me my glasses, Bill, will you. Thanks.' McGibbon was sitting up, his face all lather,

digging in his pocket. He produced a clipping. Read aloud with gusto :—

'"Mrs Stelton's art has deepened and broadened appreciably since she last appeared in Sunbury. Always gifted with a splendid singing organ, always charming in personality and profoundly, rhythmically musical in temperament, she now has added a superstructure of technical authority which gives to each passage, whether bravura or pianissimo, a quality and distinction."'

McGibbon was momentarily choked by his own almost noiseless laughter. Bill pushed his head down and went swiftly to work on his right cheek. Two other customers had come in.

'Great stuff that!' observed McGibbon cautiously, under the razor. '"Profoundly, rhythmically musical in temperament"! "A superstructure of technical authority"! Great! Fine! That boy'll do something yet. Handled right. Wish he was working for me.'

Mr Boice, from whom sounds had been coming for several moments, now raised his voice. It was the first time Heinie had ever heard him raise it. Bill paused, razor in air, and glanced around. Pinkie Potter looked up from the shoes he was polishing.

'Well,' he roared huskily, 'what in hell's the matter with that!'

Just then Bill turned McGibbon's head the other way. He too raised his voice. But cheerfully.

'Nothing much. Nice lot o' words. Only Mrs Stelton wasn't there. Sprained her ankle in the Chicago station on the way out.'

Bill Schwartz had a trumpet-like Prussian voice. The situation seemed to him to contain the elements of humour. He laughed boisterously.

Heinie Schultz, more politic, tittered softly, shears against mouth.

Pinkie Potter laughed convulsively, and beat out an intricate rag-time tattoo on his bootblack's stand with his brush.

4

It was Mr Boice's fixed habit to go on, toward noon, to the post-office. Instead, to-day, he returned to the *Voice* office.

He seated himself at his desk for a quarter of an hour, doing nothing. He had the faculty of sitting still, ruminating.

Finally he reached out for the two-foot rule that always lay on his desk, and carefully measured a certain article in last week's paper. Then did a little figuring.

He rose, moved toward the door; turned, and remarked to the wondering Humphrey :—

'Take fifteen inches off Henry's string this week, Weaver. A dollar 'n' five cents. Be at the post-office if anybody wants me.' And went out.

Humphrey himself measured Henry's article on the musicale. Old Boice had been accurate enough; it came to an even fifteen inches. Which at seven cents an inch, would be a dollar and five cents.

When Henry reappeared and together they set out for Lower Chestnut Avenue, Humphrey found he hadn't the heart to break this fresh disappointment to his friend. He decided to let it drift until the Saturday. Something might turn up.

Henry's mood had changed. He had left the office, an hour earlier, looking like a discouraged boy. Now he was serious, silent, hard to talk to. He seemed three years older. With certain of Henry's rather violently contrasted phases Humphrey was familiar; but he had never seen him look quite like this. Henry was strung up. Plainly. He walked very fast, striding intently forward. At least once in each block he found himself a yard ahead of his companion, checked himself, muttered a few words that sounded vaguely like an apology and then repeated the process.

At Mrs Henderson's Henry was grave and curiously attractive. He had charm, no doubt of it—a sort of charm that women, older women, felt. Mildred Henderson

distinctly played up to him. And Corinne, Humphrey noted, watched him now and then; the quietly observant keenness in her big dark eyes masked by her easy, lazy smile.

Toward the close of luncheon Henry's evident inner tension showed signs of taking the form of gaiety. He acted like a young man wholly sure of himself. Humphrey's net impression, after more than a year and a half of close association with the boy, was that he couldn't ever be sure of himself. Not for one minute. Yet, when they threw down their napkins and pushed back their chairs, it was Henry who said, with an apparently easy arrogance back of his grain :—

'Hump, you've got to be going back so soon, we're going to give you and Mildred the living-room. We'll wash the dishes.'

Humphrey noted the quick little snap of amusement in Mrs Henderson's eyes (Henry had not before openly used her first name) and the demure, expressionless look that came over Corinne's face. Neither was displeased.

To Mrs Henderson's, 'You'll do no such thing!' Henry responded smilingly :—

'I won't be contradicted. Not to-day.'

Corinne was still silent. But Mrs Henderson, now frankly amused, asked :—

'Why the to-day, Henry?'

'Oh, I don't know. Just the way I feel,' said he; and ushered her with mock politeness into the front room, then, gallantly, almost nonchalantly, took the elbow of the unresisting Corinne and led her toward the kitchen.

Humphrey lighted a cigarette and watched them go. Then with a slight heightening of his usually sallow colour, followed his hostess into the living-room.

It will be evident to the reader that among these four young persons, rather casually thrown together in the first instance, something of an 'understanding' had grown up.

There had been a furtive delight about their first gathering at Humphrey's rooms, a sense of exciting variety in humdrum village life, the very real and lively pleasure of exploring fresh personalities.

Of late years, looking back, it has seemed to me that Mildred Henderson never really belonged in Sunbury, where a woman's whole duty lay in keeping house economically and as pleasantly as might be for the husband who spent his days in Chicago. And in bearing and rearing his children. I never knew anything of her earlier life, before Arthur V. Henderson brought her to the modest house on Chestnut Avenue. I never could figure why she married him at all. Marriages are made in so many places besides Heaven! He used to like to hear her play.

In those days, and a little later, I judged her much as the village judged her—peering out at her through the gun-ports in the armour plate of self-righteousness that is the strong defence of every suburban community. But now I feel that her real mistake lay in waiting so long before drifting to her proper environment in New York. Like all of us, she had, sooner or later, to work out her life in its own terms or die alive of an atrophied spirit. She had gifts, and needed, doubtless, to express them. I can see her now as she was in Sunbury during those years—little, trim, slim, with a quick alert smile and snappy eyes. Not a beautiful woman, perhaps not even an out-and-out pretty one, but curiously attractive. She had much of what men call 'personality.' And she was efficient, in her own way. She never let her musical gift rust; practised every day of her life, I think. Including Sundays. Which was one of the things Sunbury held against her.

Humphrey, too, was using Sunbury as little more than a stop gap. We knew that sooner or later he would strike his gait as an inventor. He was quiet about it. Much thought, deep plans, lay back of that long wrinkly face. While he kept at it he was a conscientious country editor. But his heart was in his library of technical books, and in his workshop in the old Parmenter barn. He must have put just about all of his little inheritance into the place.

Corinne Doag was distinctly a city person. And she was a real singer, with ambition and a firm, even hard purpose, I can see now, back of the languorous dusky eyes and the wide slow smile that Henry was not then man enough to understand. In those days, more than in the present, a

girl with a strong sense of identity was taught to hide it scrupulously. It was still the century of Queen Victoria. The life of any live girl had to be a rather elaborate pretence of something it distinctly was not. For which we, looking back, can hardly blame her. Besides, Corinne was young, healthy, glowing with a quietly exuberant sense of life. I imagine she found a sort of pure joy, an animal joy, in playing with men and life. She wasn't dishonest. She certainly liked Henry. Particularly to-day. But this was the summer time. She was playing. And she liked to be thrilled.

5

An hour later, could Humphrey have glanced into the butler's pantry, he would have concluded that he knew Henry Calverly not at all. And Miss Wombast, could she have looked in, would have been thrilled and frightened, perhaps to the point of never speaking to Henry again. And of never, never forgetting him.

As the scene has a bearing on the later events of the day, we will take a look.

They stood in the butler's pantry, Henry and Corinne. The shards of a shattered coffee cup lay unobserved at their feet. Out in the kitchen sink all the silver and the other cups and saucers lay in the rinsing rack, the soapsuds dry on them. Henry held Corinne in his arms.

'Henry,' she whispered, 'we *must* finish the dishes! What on earth will Mildred think?'

'Let her think!' said Henry.

Corinne leaned back against the shelves, disengaged her hands long enough to smooth her flying blue-black hair.

'Henry, I never thought——'

'Never thought what?'

'Wait! My hair's all down again. They might come out here. I mean you seemed——'

'How did I seem? Say it!'

'Oh well—*Henry!*—I mean sort of—well, reserved. I thought you were shy.'

'Think so now?'

'I—well, no. Not exactly. Wait now, you silly boy! Really, Henry, you musn't be so—so intense.'

'But I *am* intense. I'm not the way I look. Nobody knows——' Here he interrupted himself.

'Oh, Henry,' she breathed, her head on his shoulder now, her arm clinging about his neck. He felt very manly. Life, real life, whirled, glowed, sparkled about him. He was exultant. 'You dear boy—I'm afraid you've made love to lots of girls.'

'I *haven't*!' he protested, with unquestionable sincerity. 'Not to lots.'

'Silly!' A silence. Then he felt her draw even closer to him. 'Henry, talk to me! Make love to me! Tell me you'll take me away with you—to-day!—now! Make me feel how wonderful it would be! Say it, anyway—even if—oh, Henry, *say* it!'

For an instant Henry's mind went cold and clear. He was a little frightened. He found himself wondering if this tempestuous young woman who clung so to him could possibly be the easy, lazy, comfortably smiling Corinne. He thought of Carmen—the Carmen of Calvé. He had suped once in that opera down at the Auditorium. He had paid fifty cents to the supe captain.

The thrill of the conqueror was his. But he was beginning to feel that this was enough, that he had best rest his case, perhaps, at this point.

As for asking her to fly away with him, he couldn't conscientiously so much as ask her to have dinner with him in Chicago. Not in the present state of his pocket.

One fact, however, emerged. He must propose something. He could at least have it out with old Boice. Settle that salary business. He'd *have* to.

Another fact is that he was by no means so cool as he, for the moment, fancied himself.

The door from dining-room to kitchen opened, rather slowly. There was a light step in the kitchen, and Mildred Henderson's musical little voice humming the theme of the Andante in the Fifth Symphony.

Henry and Corinne leaped apart. She smoothed her

hair again, and patted her cheeks. Then she took a black hair from his shoulder.

They heard Mildred at the sink. Rinsing the dishes and the silver, doubtless.

'Hate to disturb you two,' she called, a reassuring if slightly humorous sympathy in her voice, 'but I promised Humphrey I'd get after you, Henry. He says you simply must get some work done to-day.'

Henry stood motionless, trying to think.

'Do your work here,' Corinne whispered. 'Stay.'

He shook his head. 'A lot I'd get done—here with you. Now.'

'I'll help you. Couldn't I be just a little inspiration to you?'

'It ain't inspiring work.'

'Henry—write something for me! Write me a poem!

'All right. Not to-day, though. Gotta do this Business Men's Picnic.'

Then he said, 'Wait a minute;' went into the kitchen.

'Going over town,' he remarked, offhand, to Mrs Henderson.

At the outer door, Corinne murmured: 'You'll come back, Henry?'

With a vague little wave of one hand, and a perplexed expression, he replied: 'Yes, of course.' And hurried off.

6

Mr Boice wasn't at his desk at the *Voice* sanctum. Henry could see that much through the front window. He didn't go in. He felt that he couldn't talk with Humphrey—or anybody—right now. Except old Boice. He was gunning for him. Equal to him, too. Equal to anything. Blazing with determination. Could lick a regiment.

He found his employer down at the post-office. In his little den behind the money-order window. He asked Miss Hemple, there, if he could please speak to Mr Boice.

Once again on this eventful day that conservative

member of the village triumvirate found himself forced to gaze at the dressy if now slightly rumpled youth with a silly little moustache that he couldn't seem to let go of, and the thin bamboo stick with a crook at the end. The youth whose time was so valuable that he couldn't arrange to do his work. And once again irritation stirred behind the spotted, rounded-out vest and the thick, wavy, yellowish-white whiskers.

He sat back in his swivel chair; looked at Henry with lustreless eyes; made sounds.

'Mr Boice,' said Henry, 'I—I want to speak with you. It's—it's this way. I don't feel that you're doing quite the right thing by me.'

Another sound from the editor-postmaster. Then silence.

'You gave me to understand that I'd get better pay if I suited. Well, the way you're doing it, I don't even get as much. It ain't right! It ain't square! Now—well—you see, I've about come to the conclusion that if the work I do ain't worth ten a week—well——'

It is to be remembered of Norton P. Boice that he was a village politician of something like forty years' experience. As such he put no trust whatever in words. Once to-day he had raised his voice, and the fact was disturbing. He had weathered a thousand little storms by keeping his mouth shut, sitting tight. He never criticised or quarrelled. He disbelieved utterly in emotions of any sort. He hadn't written a letter in twenty-odd years. And he was not likely to lose his temper again this day—week—or month.

Henry didn't dream that at this moment he was profoundly angry. Though Henry was too full of himself to observe the other party to the controversy.

Mr Boice clasped his hands on his stomach and sat still.

Henry chafed.

After a time Mr Boice asked, 'Have you done the story of the Business Men's Picnic?'

Henry shook his head.

'Better get it done, hadn't you?'

Henry shook his head again.

Mr Boice continued to sit—motionless, expressionless. His thoughts ran to this effect :—The article on the picnic was by far the most important matter of the whole summer. Every advertiser on Simpson Street looked for whole paragraphs about himself and his family. Henry was supposed to cover it. He had been there. It would be by no means easy, now, to work up a proper story from any other quarter.

'Suppose,' he remarked, 'you go ahead and get the story in. Then we can have a little talk if you like. I'm rather busy this afternoon.'

He tried to say it ingratiatingly, but it sounded like all other sounds that passed his lips—colourless, casual.

Henry stood up very stiff; drew in a deep breath or two. His fingers tightened about his stick. His colour rose.

He leaned over; rested a hand on the corner of the desk.

'Mr Boice,' he said, firmly if huskily, and a good deal louder than was desirable, here in the post-office, within ear-shot of the money-order window—'Mr Boice, what I want from you won't take two minutes of your time. You'd better tell me, right now, whether I'm worth ten dollars a week to the *Voice*. Beginning this week. If I'm not—I'll hand in my string Saturday and quit. Think I can't do better'n this! I wonder! You wait till about next November. Maybe I'll show the whole crowd of you a thing or two! Maybe——'

For the second time on this remarkable day the unexpected happened to and through Norton P. Boice.

Slowly, with an effort and a grunt, he got to his feet. Colour appeared in his face, above the whiskers. He pointed a huge, knobby finger at the door.

'Get out of here!' he roared. 'And stay out!'

Henry hesitated, swung away, turned back to face him; finally obeyed.

Jobless, stirred by a rather fascinating sense of utter catastrophe, thinking with a sudden renewal of exultation about Corinne, Henry wandered up to the Y.M.C.A. rooms and idly, moodily, practised shooting crokinole counters.

Shortly he wandered out. An overpowering restlessness was upon him. He wanted desperately to do something, but didn't know what it could be. It was as if a live wild animal, caged within his breast, was struggling to get out.

He walked over to the rooms; threw off his coat; tried fooling at the piano; gave it up and took to pacing the floor.

There were peculiar difficulties here, in the big living-room. Corinne had spent an evening here. She had sat in this chair and that, had danced over the hardwood floor, had smiled on him. The place, without her, was painfully empty.

He knew now that he wanted to write. But he didn't know what. The wild animal was a story. Or a play. Or a poem. Perhaps the poem Corinne had begged for. He stood in the middle of the room, closed his eyes, and saw and felt Corinne close to him. It was a mad but sweet reverie. Yes, surely it was the poem!

He found pencil and paper—a wad of copy paper, and curled up in the window-seat.

Things were not right. Not yet. He was the victim of wild forces. They were tearing at him. It was no longer restlessness—it was a mighty passion. It was uncomfortable and thrilling. Queer that the impulse to write should come so overwhelmingly without giving him, so far, a hint as to what he was to write. Yet it was not vague. He had to do it. And at once. Find the right place and go straight at it. It would come out. It would have to come out.

7

Mr Boice came heavily into the *Voice* office and sank into his creaking chair by the front window.

Humphrey went swiftly, steadily through galley after galley of proof. Humphrey had the trained eye that can pick out an inverted *u* in a page of print at three feet. He smoked his cob pipe as he worked.

Mr Boice drew a few sheets of copy paper from a pigeon-hole, took up a pencil in his stiff fingers, and gazed down over his whiskers.

It was a decade or more since the 'editor' of the *Voice* had done any actual work. Every day he dropped quiet suggestions, whispered a word of guidance to this or that lieutenant, and listened to assorted ideas and opinions. He was a power in the village, no doubt about that. But to compose and write out three columns of his own paper was hopelessly beyond him. It called for youth, or for the long habit of a country hack. The deep permanent grooves in his mind were channels for another sort of thinking.

For an hour he sat there. Gradually Humphrey became aware of him. It was odd anyway that he should be here. He seldom returned in the afternoon.

Finally he looked over at the younger man, and made sounds.

Humphrey raised his head; removed his pipe.

'Guess you better fix up a little account of the Business Men's Picnic, Weaver,' he remarked.

'Henry's doing that.'

Mr Boice's massive head moved slowly, sidewise. 'No,' he said, 'he won't be doing it.'

Humphrey leaned back in his chair. His face wrinkled reflectively; his brows knotted. He held up his pipe; rubbed the worn cob with the palm of his hand.

Mr Boice got up and moved toward the door.

'I've let Henry go,' he said.

Humphrey went on rubbing his pipe; squinting at it.

Mr Boice paused in the door; looked back.

'I'll ask you to attend to it, Weaver.'

Humphrey shook his head.

Mr Boice stood looking at him.

'No,' said Humphrey. 'Afraid I can't help you out.'

Mr Boice stood motionless. There was no expression on his face, but Humphrey knew what the steady look meant. He added:—

'I wasn't there.'

Still Mr Boice stood. Humphrey took a fresh galley

proof from the hook and fell to work at it. After a little Mr Boice moved back to his desk and creaked down into his chair. Again he reached for the copy paper.

Humphrey, in a merciful moment when he was leaving for the day, thought of suggesting that Murray Johnston, local man for the City Press Association, might be called on in the emergency. He had been at the picnic. He could write the story easily enough, if he could spare the time. A faint smile flitted across his face at the reflection that it would cost old Boice five or six times what he was usually willing to pay in the *Voice*.

But Mr Boice, bending over the desk, a pencil gripped in his fingers, a sentence or two written and crossed out on the top sheet of copy paper, did not so much as lift his eyes. And Humphrey went on out.

8

Humphrey let himself into Mrs Henderson's front hall, closed the screen door gently behind him, and looked about the dim interior. There seemed to be no one in the living-room. The girls were in the kitchen, doubtless, getting supper. Mildred had faithfully promised not to bother cooking anything hot. He hung up his hat.

Then he saw a feminine figure up the stairs, curled on the top step, against the wall.

It was Corinne. She was pressing her finger to her lips and shaking her head.

She motioned him out toward the kitchen. There he found his hostess.

'Seen Henry?' he asked. 'Old Boice fired him to-day, and he's disappeared. Not at the rooms. And I looked in at the Y.M.C.A.'

'He's here,' said Mildred. 'A very interesting thing is happening, Humphrey. I've always told you he was a genius.'

'But what's up?'

'We've got him upstairs at my desk. He's writing something. I think it's a poem for Corinne.'

'A poem! But——'

'It's really quite wonderful. Now don't you go and throw cold water on it, Humphrey.' She came over, very trim and pretty in her long apron, her face flushed with the heat of the stove, slipped her hand through his arm, and looked up at him. 'It's really very exciting. I haven't seen the boy act this way for two years. He came in here, all out of breath, and said he had to write. He didn't seem to know what. He's quite wild. I never in my life saw such concentration. It seems that he's promised Corinne a poem.'

'Wonder what's got into him,' Humphrey mused.

Mildred returned to her salad dressing. 'Genius has got into him,' she said, a bright little snap in her eyes. 'And it's coming out. He's been up there nearly two hours now. Corinne's guarding. She'd kill you if you disturbed him. She peeked in a little while ago. She says there's a lot of it—all over the floor—and he was writing like mad. She couldn't see any of it. As soon as he saw her he yelled at her and waved her out.'

'Hm!' said Humphrey.

'Humphrey, my dear,' said Mildred then, 'I'm really afraid we've got to watch those two a little. Something's been happening to-day. Corinne has gone perfectly mad over him—to-day—all of a sudden. She fretted every minute he was away. Henry doesn't know it, but Corinne is a pretty self-willed girl. And just now she's got her mind on him.'

She came over again, took his arm, and looked up at Humphrey. She was at once sophisticating and confiding. There was a touch of something that might have been tenderness, even wistfulness, in her voice as about her eyes.

'I've really been worrying a little about them. About Henry particularly, for some reason.' She gave a soft little laugh, and pressed his arm. 'They're so young, Humphrey—such green little things. Or he is, at least. I've been impatient for you to come.'

'I got down as soon as I could,' said Humphrey, looking down at her.

'Of course, I know.'

'I've been worrying about him, too.'

When the supper was ready, Mildred made Humphrey sit at the table and herself tiptoed up the stairs.

She came back, still on tiptoe, smiling as if at her own thoughts.

'He won't eat,' she explained. 'He's still at it. I wish you could see my room. It's a sight.'

'Corinne coming down?'

'Not she. She won't budge from the stairs. And she flared up when I suggested bringing up a tray. I never thought that Corinne was romantic, but . . . Well, it gives us a nice little *tête-à-tête* supper. I've made iced coffee, Humphrey. Just dip into the salad, won't you!'

After supper they went out to the hall. Corinne, still on the top step, had switched on the light and was sorting out a pile of loose sheets. She beckoned to them. They came tiptoeing up the stairs.

'I can't make it out,' she whispered. 'It isn't poetry. And he doesn't number his pages.'

'How did you ever get them?' asked Mildred.

'Went in and gathered them up. He didn't hear me. He's still at it.'

Humphrey reached for the sheets; held them to the light; read bits of this sheet and that; found a few that went together and read them in order; finally turned a wrinkled astonished face to the two young women.

'What is it?' they asked.

He chuckled softly. 'Well, it isn't poetry.'

'I saw that much,' Corinne murmured, rather mournfully.

'It's—wait a minute! I couldn't believe it at first. It—no—yes, that's what it is.'

'What!'

Then Humphrey dropped down at Mildred's feet, and laughed, softly at first, then with increasing vigour.

Mildred clapped her hand over his mouth and ran him down the stairs and through into the living-room. There they dropped side by side on the sofa and laughed until tears came.

Corinne, laughing a little herself now, but perplexed, followed them.

'Here,' said Humphrey, when he could speak, 'let's get into this.'

They moved to the table. Humphrey spread out the pages, and skimmed them over with a practised eye, arranging as he read.

Once he muttered, 'What on earth!' And shortly after: 'Why, the young devil!'

'Please—' said Corinne. 'Please! I want to know what it is.'

Humphrey stacked up the sheets, and laid them on the table.

'Well,' he remarked, 'it is certainly an account of the Business Men's Picnic. And it certainly was *not* written for *The Weekly Voice of Sunbury*. I'll start in a minute and read it through. But from what I've seen—— Well, while it may be a little Kiplingesque—naturally—still it comes pretty close to being a work of art.

'Tell you what the boy's done. He's gone at that little community outing just about as an artistic god would have gone at it. As if he'd never seen any of these Simpson Street folks before. Berger, the grocer, and William F. Donovan, and Mr Wombast, and Charlie Waterhouse, and Weston of the bank, and—and, here, the little Dutchman that runs the lunch counter down by the tracks, and Heinie Schultz and Bill Schwartz, and old Boice! It's a crime what he's done to Boice. If this ever appears, Sunbury will be too small for Henry Calverly. But, oh, it's grand writing! . . . He's got 'em all in, their clothes, their little mannerisms—their tricks of speech . . . Wait, I'll read it.'

Forty minutes later the three sat back in their chairs, weak from laughter, each in his own way excited, aware that a real performance was taking place, right here in the house.

'One thing I don't quite understand,' said Mildred. 'It's a lovely bit of writing—he makes you see it and feel it—where Mr Boice and Charles Waterhouse were around behind the lemonade stand, and Mr Waterhouse is upset because the purse they're going to surprise him with for being the most popular man in town isn't large enough. What *is* all that, anyway?'

'I know,' said Humphrey. 'I was wondering about that. It's funny as the dickens, those two birds out there behind the lemonade stand quarrelling about it. It's—let's see—oh, yes! And Boice says, "It won't help you to worry, Charlie. We're doing what we can for you. But it'll take time. And it's a chance!" . . . Funny!'

He lowered the manuscript, and stared at the wall. 'Hm!' he remarked thoughtfully. 'Mildred, got any cigarettes?'

'Yes, I have, but I don't care to be mystified like this. Take one, and tell me exactly what you're thinking.'

'I'm thinking that Bob McGibbon would give a hundred dollars for this story as it stands, right now.'

'Why?'

'Because he's gunning for Charlie. And for Boice.'

'And what's this?'

'Evidence.' Humphrey was grave now. 'Not quite it. But warm. Very warm.'

'He's really stumbled on something. How perfectly lovely!'

'And he doesn't know it. Sees nothing but the story value of it. But it may be serious. They'd duck him in the lake. They'd drown him.'

'But how lovely if Henry, by one stroke of his pencil, should really puncture the frauds in this smug town.'

'There is something in that,' mused Humphrey.

'Ssh!' From Mildred.

They heard a slow step on the stairs.

A moment, and Henry appeared in the doorway. He stopped short when he saw them. His glasses hung dangling against his shirt front. He was coatless, but plainly didn't know it. His straight brown hair was rumpled up on one side and down in a shock over the farther eye. He was pale, and looked tired about the eyes. He carried more of the manuscript.

He stared at them as if he couldn't quite make them out, or as if not sure he had met them. Then he brushed a hand across his forehead and slowly, rather wanly, smiled.

'I had no idea it was so late,' he said.

Mildred and Corinne fed him and petted him while

Humphrey drew a big chair into the dining-room, smoked cigarette after cigarette, and studied the brightening, expanding youth before him. He reflected, too, on the curious, instant responsiveness that is roused in the imaginative woman at the first evidence of the creative impulse in a man. As if the elemental mother were moved.

'That's probably it,' he thought. 'And it's what the boy has needed. Martha Caldwell couldn't give it to him—never in the world! He was groping to find it in that tough little Wilcox girl. It wouldn't do to tell him—no, I mustn't tell him; got to steady him down all I can—but I rather guess he's been needing a Mildred and a Corinne. These two years.'

9

Humphrey stood up then, said he was going out for half an hour, and picked up the manuscript from the living-room table as he passed.

He went straight to Boice's house on Upper Chestnut Avenue.

'What has all this to do with me?' asked Mr Boice, behind closed doors in his roomy library. 'Let him write anything he likes.'

Humphrey sat back; slowly turned the pages of the manuscript.

'This,' he said, 'is a real piece of writing. It's the best picture of a community outing I ever read in my life. It's vivid. The characters are so real that a stranger, after reading this, could walk up Simpson Street and call fifteen people by name. He'd know how their voices sound, what their weaknesses are, what they're really thinking about Sunday mornings in church. It is humour of the finest kind. But they won't know it on Simpson Street. They'll be sore as pups, every man. He's taken their skulls off and looked in. He's as impersonal, as cruel, as Shakespeare.'

This sounded pretty highfalutin' to Mr Boice. He made a reflective sound; then remarked:—

'You think the advertisers wouldn't like it.'

'They'd hate it. They'd fight. It would raise Ned in the town. But McGibbon wouldn't mind. Or if he didn't have the nerve to print it, any Sunday editor in Chicago would eat it alive.'

'Well, what——'

Humphrey quietly interrupted.

'Little scenes, all through. Funny as Pickwick. There really is a touch of genius in it. Handles you pretty roughly. But they'd laugh. No doubt about that. All sorts of scenes —you and Charlie Waterhouse behind the lemonade stand—Bill Parker's little accident in the tug-of-war.'

He read on, to himself. But he knew that Mr Boice sat up stiffly in his chair, with a grunt. He heard him rise, ponderously, and move down the room; then come back.

When he spoke, Humphrey, aware of his perturbation, was moved to momentary admiration by his apparent calmness. He sounded just as usual.

'What are you getting at?' he asked. 'You want something.'

'I want you to take Henry back at—say, twelve a week.'

'Hm. Have him re-write this?'

'No. Henry won't be able to write another word this week. He's empty. My idea is, Mr Boice, that you'll want to do the cutting yourself. When you've done that, I'll pitch in on the re-write. We can get our three columns out of it all right.'

'Hm!'

'There's one thing you may be sure of. Henry doesn't know what he's written. No idea. It's a flash of pure genius.'

'Don't know that we've got much use for a genius on the *Voice*,' grunted Mr Boice. 'He ought to go to Chicago or New York.'

'He will, some day.' Humphrey rose. 'Will you send for him in the morning?'

There was a long silence. Then a sound. Then :—

'Tell him to come around.'

'Twelve a week, including this week?'

The massive yellowish-gray head inclined slowly.

'Very well, I'll tell him.'

'You can leave the manuscript here, Weaver.'

'No.' Humphrey deliberately folded it and put it in an inside pocket. 'Henry will have to give it to you himself. It's his. Good-night.'

Out on the street, Humphrey reflected, with a touch of exuberance rare in his life :—

'We won't either of us be long on the *Voice*. Not now. But it's great going while it lasts.'

And he wondered, with a little stir of excitement, just why that purse wasn't enough for Charlie Waterhouse . . . just what old Boice knew . . . Why it was a chance! Curious! Something back of it, something that McGibbon was eternally pounding at—hinting—insinuating. Something real there; something that might never be known.

10

Humphrey felt that the little triumph—though it might indeed prove temporary; any victory over old Boice in Sunbury affairs was likely to be that—called for celebrating in some special degree. He had, it seemed, a few bottles of beer at the rooms.

So thither they adjourned; Mildred and Humphrey strolling slowly ahead, Corinne and Henry strolling still more slowly behind.

Henry seemed fagged. At least he was quiet.

Corinne, stirred with a sympathetic interest not common to her sort of nature, stole hesitant glances at him, even, finally, slipped her hand through his arm.

She hung back. Mildred and Humphrey disappeared in the shadows of the maples a block ahead.

'I suppose you're pretty tired, aren't you?' Corinne murmured.

Her voice seemed to waken him out of a dream.

'I—I—what was that? Oh—tired? Why, I don't know. Sorta.'

Her hand slipped down his forearm, within easy reach of his hand; but he was unaware.

'I'm frightfully excited,' he said, brightening. 'If you knew what this meant to me! Feeling like this. The

Power—but you wouldn't know what that meant. Only it lifts me up. I know I'm all right now. It's been an awful two years. You've no idea. Drudgery. Plugging along. But I'm up again now. I can do it any time I want. I'm free of this dam' town. They can't hold me back now.

'You'll do big things,' she said, a mournful note in her voice.

'I know. I feel that.'

And now she stopped short. In a shadow.

'What is it?' he asked casually. 'What's the matter?

She glanced at his face; then down.

'Do you think you'll write—a poem?' she asked almost sullenly.

'Maybe. I don't know. It's queer—you get all stirred up inside, and then something comes. You can't tell what it's going to be. It's as if it came from outside yourself. You know. Spooky.'

She moved on now, bringing him with her.

'Mildred and Humphrey'll wonder where we are,' she said crossly.

Henry glanced down at her; then at the shadowy arch of maples ahead. He wondered what was the matter with her. Girls were, of course, notoriously difficult. Never knew their own minds. He was exultantly happy. It had been a great day. Twelve a week now, and going up! Hump was a good old soul. . . . He recalled, with a recurrence of both the thrill and the conservatism that had come then, that he had had a great time with Corinne in the early afternoon. Mustn't go too far with that sort of thing, of course. But she was sure a peach. And she didn't seem the sort that would be for ever trying to pin you down. He took her hand now. It was great to feel her there, close beside him.

Corinne walked more rapidly. He didn't know that she was biting her lip. Nor did he perceive what she saw clearly, bitterly; that she had unwittingly served a purpose in his life, which he would never understand. And she saw, too, that the little job was, for the present, at least, over and done with.

She stole another sidelong glance at him. He was twisting up the ends of his moustache. And humming.

IV

THE WHITE STAR

I

FROM the university clock, up in the north end of Sunbury village, twelve slow strokes boomed out.

Henry Calverly, settled comfortably in the hammock on Mrs Arthur V. Henderson's front porch, behind the honeysuckle vine, listened dreamily.

Beside him in the hammock was Corinne Doag.

At the corner, two houses away, a sizzing, flaring, sputtering arc lamp gave out the only sound and the only light in the neighbourhood. Lower Chestnut Avenue was sound asleep.

The storage battery in the modern automobile will automatically cut itself off from the generator when fully charged. Henry's emotional nature was of similar construction. Corinne had overcharged him, and automatically he cut her off.

The outer result of this action and reaction was a rather bewildering quarrel.

Early in the present evening, shortly after Humphrey Weaver and Mrs Henderson left the porch for a little ramble to the lake—'Back in a few minutes,' Mildred had remarked—the quarrel had been made up. Neither could have told how. Each felt relieved to be comfortably back on a hammock footing.

Henry, indeed, was more than relieved. He was quietly exultant. The thrill of conquest was upon him. It was as if she were an enemy whom he had defeated and captured. He was experiencing none of the sensations that he supposed were symptoms of what is called love. Yet what he was experiencing was pleasurable. He could even lie back here and think coolly about it, revel in it.

Corinne's head stirred.

'That was midnight,' she murmured.

'What of it?'

'I suppose I ought to be thinking about going in.'

'I don't see that your chaperon's in such a rush.'

'I know. They've been hours. They might have walked around to the rooms.'

Henry was a little shocked at the thought.

'Oh, no,' he remarked. 'They'd hardly have gone *there* —without us.'

'Mildred would if she wanted to. It has seemed to me lately . . .'

'What?'

'I don't know—but once or twice—as if she might be getting a little too fond of Humphrey.'

'Oh'—there was concern in Henry's voice—'do you think so?'

'I wonder if you know just how fascinating that man is, Henry.'

'He's never been with girls—not around here. You've no idea—he just lives with his books, and in his shop.'

'Perhaps that's why,' said she. 'Partly. Mildred ought to be careful.'

Henry, soberly considering this new light on his friend, looked off toward the corner.

He sat up abruptly.

'Henry! For goodness' sake! Ouch—my hair!'

'Ssh! Look—that man coming across! Wait. There now—with a suit-case!'

'Oh, Henry, you scared me! Don't be silly. He's way out in . . . Henry! How awful! It *is*!'

'What'll we do?'

'I don't know. Get up. Sit over there.' She was working at her hair; she smoothed her 'waist,' and pulled out the puff sleeves.

The man came rapidly nearer. His straw hat was tipped back. They could see the light of a cigar. A mental note of Henry's was that Arthur V. Henderson had been a football player at the state university. And a boxer. Even out of condition he was a strong man.

'Quick—think of something to tell him! It'll have to be a lie. Henry—*think!*'

Then, as he stood motionless, helpless, she got up, thrust his hat and bamboo stick into his hands, and led him on tiptoe around the corner of the house.

'We've got to do something. Henry, for goodness' sake—'

'We've got to find her, I think.'

'I know it. But——'

'If she came in with Hump, and he—you know, this time of night—why, something awful might happen. There might be murder. Mr Henderson——'

'Don't talk such stuff! Keep your head. Well—he's coming! Here!'

She gripped his hand, dragged him down the side steps, and ran lightly with him out past the woodshed to the alley. They walked to the side street and, keeping in the shadows, out to the Chestnut Avenue corner. From this spot they commanded the house.

Mr Henderson had switched on lights in front hall, dining-room, and kitchen. The parlour was still dark. Next he had gone upstairs, for there were lights in the upper windows. After a brief time he appeared in the front doorway. He lighted a fresh cigar, then opened the screen door and came out on the porch. He stood there, looking up and down the street. Then he seated himself on the top step, elbows on knees, like a man thinking.

'Henry!'

'Yes.'

'Listen! You go over to the rooms and see.'

'But they might be down at the lake.'

'Not all this time. Mildred doesn't like sitting on beaches. If you find them, bring her back. We'll go in together, she and I. We'll patch up a story. It's all right. Just keep your head.'

'What'll you do?'

'Wait here.'

'I don't like to leave you.'

'You'll see me again.'

'I know, but——'

'Well . . . Now hurry!'

2

The old barn was dark.

'Hm!' mused Henry, pulling at his soft little moustache. 'Hm! Certainly aren't here. Take a look though.'

With his latch-key he softly opened the alley door; felt his way through machinery and belting to the stairs. At the top he stood a moment, peering about for the electric switch. He hadn't lived here long enough to know the place as he had come to know his old room in Wilcox's boarding-house.

A voice—Humphrey's—said:—

'Don't turn the light on.' Then, 'Is it you, Hen?'

There they were—over in the farther window-seat—sitting very still, huddled together—a mere faint shape against the dim outside light. He felt his way around the centre table, toward them.

'Looking for you,' he said. His voice was husky. There was a throbbing in his temples. And he was curiously breathless.

He stood. It was going to be hard to tell them. He hadn't thought of this; had just rushed over here, headlong.

'I suppose it's pretty late,' said Mildred. There was a dreamy quality in her voice that Henry had not heard there before. He stood silent.

'Well'—Humphrey's voice had the dry, even slightly acid quality that now and then crept into it—'anything special, Hen? Here we are!'

Henry cleared his throat. That huskiness seemed unconquerable. And his over-vivid imagination was playing fantastic tricks on him. Hideous little pictures, very clear. Wives murdering husbands; husbands murdering lovers; dragged-out, soul-crushing scenes in dingy, high-ceiled court-rooms.

Humphrey got up, drew down the window shade behind Mrs Henderson, and turned on the light. She shielded her eyes with a slim hand.

Henry, staring at her, felt her littleness; paused in the

rush of his thoughts to dwell on it. She looked prettier to-night, too. The softness that had been in her voice was in her face as well, particularly about the half-shadowed mouth. She was always pretty, but in a trim, neat, brisk way. Now, curled up there in the window-seat, her feet under her, very quiet, she seemed like a little girl that you would have to protect from the world and give toys to.

Henry, to his own amazement—and chagrin—covered his face and sobbed.

'Good lord!' said Humphrey. 'What's all this? What's the matter?'

The long silence that followed was broken by Mildred. Still shielding her eyes, without stirring, she asked, quietly:—

'Has my husband come home?'

Henry nodded.

'Where's Corinne?'

'She—she's waiting on the corner, in case you . . .'

Mildred moved now; dropped her chin into her hand, pursed her lips a little, seemed to be studying out the pattern of the rug.

'Did he—did he see either of you?'

Henry shook his head.

Mildred pressed a finger to her lips.

'We mustn't leave Corinne waiting out there,' she said.

Humphrey dropped down beside her and took her hand. His rather sombre gaze settled on her face and hair. Thus they sat until, slowly, she raised her head and looked into his eyes. Then his lips framed the question:—

'Stay here?'

Her eyes widened a little, and slowly filled. She gave him her other hand. But she shook her head.

A little later he said:—

'Come then, dear. We'll go down there.'

From the top of the stairs he switched on a light in the shop. Mildred, very pale, went down. Henry was about to follow. But he saw Humphrey standing, darting glances about the room, softly snapping his bony fingers. The long, swarthy face was wrinkled into a scowl. His

eyes rested on Henry. He gave a little sigh; threw out his hands.

'It's—it's the limit!' he whispered. 'You see—my hat . . .'

That seemed to be all he could say. His face was twisted with emotion. His mouth even moved a little. But no sound came.

Henry stood waiting. At the moment his surging, uncontrollable emotion took the form of embarrassment. It seemed to him that in this crisis he ought to be polite toward his friend. But they couldn't stand here indefinitely without speaking. There was need, particular need, of politeness toward Mildred Henderson. So, mumbling, he followed her downstairs and out through the shop to the deserted alley.

Then they went down to Chestnut Avenue. Mildred and Humphrey were silent, walking close together, arm in arm. Henry, in some measure recovered from his little breakdown, or relieved by it, tried to make talk. He spoke of the stillness of the night. He said, 'It's the only time I like the town—after midnight. You don't have to see the people then.'

Then, as they offered no reply, he too fell still.

Corinne, when they found her leaning against a big maple, was in a practical frame of mind.

'There he is,' she whispered. 'Been sitting right there all the time. This is his third cigar. Now listen, Mildred. I've figured it all out. No good in letting ourselves get excited. It's all right. You and I will walk up with Henry. Just take it for granted that you've been down to the lake with us. We needn't even explain.'

Mildred, still nestling close to Humphrey's arm, seemed to be looking at her.

Then they heard her draw in her breath rather sharply, and her hand groped up toward Humphrey's shoulder.

'Wait!' she said breathlessly. 'I can't go in there now. Not right now. Wait a little. I can't!'

Humphrey led her away into the shadows.

Corinne looked at Henry. 'Hm!' she murmured—'serious!'

The university clock struck one.

Again Henry felt that pressure in the temples and dryness in the throat. His thoughts, most of them, were whirling again. But one corner of his mind was thinking clearly, coldly :—

'This is the real thing. Drama ! Life ! Maybe tragedy ! And I'm seeing it ! I'm in it, part of it !'

3

Corinne was peering into the shadows.

'Where'd they go?' she said. 'We've got to find them. This thing's getting worse every minute.'

Mildred and Humphrey were sitting on a horse block, side by side, very still. It was in front of the B. L. Ames place. Corinne stood over them. But Henry hung back; leaned weakly against a tree.

The Ames place brought up memories of other years and other girls. An odd little scene had occurred here, with Clemency Snow, on one of the lawn seats. And a darker mass of shadow in the gnarled, low-spreading oak, over by the side fence, was a well-remembered platform with seats and a ladder to the ground. Ernestine Lambert had been the girl with him up there.

Two long years back ! He was eighteen then—a mere boy, with illusions and dreams. He wasn't welcome to Mary Ames's any more. She didn't approve of him. Her mother, too. And he had sunk into a rut of small-town work on Simpson Street. They weren't fair to him. He didn't drink; smoked almost none; let the girls alone more than many young fellows—in spite of a few little things. If he had money . . . of course. You had to have money.

He felt old. And drab of spirit. Those little affairs, even the curious one with Clem Snow, had been, it seemed now, on a higher plane of feeling than this present one with Corinne. Life had been at the spring then, the shrubs dew-pearled, God in his Heaven. And the affair with Ernestine had not been so little. It had shaken him. He wondered where Ernie was now. They hadn't written

for a year and a half. And Clem was Mrs Jefferson Jenkins, very rich (Jeff Jenkins was in a bond house on La Salle Street) living in Chicago, on the Lake Shore Drive, intensely preoccupied with a girl baby. People—women and girls—said it was a beautiful baby. Girls were gushy.

He pressed a hand to his eyes. Corinne was right; the situation was getting worse every minute. During one or two of the minutes, while his memory was active, it had seemed like an unpleasant dream from which he would shortly waken. But it wasn't a dream. He felt again the tension of it. It was a tension that might easily become unbearable. First thing they knew the university clock would be striking two. He began listening for it; trying absurdly to strain his ears.

He had recently seen Minnie Maddern play *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, and had experienced a painful tension much like this—a strain too great for his sensitive imagination. He had covered his face. And he hadn't gone back for the last act.

But there was to be no running out of this.

'Well,' said Corinne, almost briskly, 'we're not getting anywhere.'

Humphrey threw out his hand irritably.

'Just—just wait a little,' he said. 'Can't you see . . .'

'It's past one.'

Corinne's manner jarred a little on all three of the others. Mildred seemed to sink even closer toward Humphrey.

Henry felt another sob coming. Desperately he swallowed it down.

Humphrey, holding Mildred's head against his shoulder, looked up at Corinne. His face was not distinctly visible; but he seemed to be studying the tall, easy-going, unexpectedly practical girl.

'I don't think you understand,' he finally said. 'It's very, very awkward. My hat is in there.'

'Where?'

'In the parlour. On the piano, I think.'

'I don't think he lighted the parlour. We three can go up just the same. Now listen. Henry can leave his hat here with you, and get yours when he comes away.'

'It has my initials in it,' said Humphrey.

Corinne walked on the grass to the corner; came swiftly back.

'Well,' she remarked dryly, 'he's been in there. The parlour's lighted.'

Mildred stirred. 'Please!' she murmured. 'Just give me a minute or two. I'm going with you.'

'Suppose,' said Corinne, 'he *has* seen the initials.'

Mildred's eyes sought Humphrey's. For a long instant, her head back on his shoulder, she gazed at him with an intensity that Henry had not before seen on a woman's face. It was as if she had forgotten himself and Corinne. And then Humphrey's arm tightened about her, as if he, too, had forgotten every one and everything else.

Henry had to turn away.

He walked to the corner. Neither Humphrey nor Mildred knew whether he went or stayed. Corinne was frowning down at them; thinking desperately.

Henry stared at the house, at the dim solitary figure on the top step, at the little red light of the cigar that came and went with the puffs.

Henry was breathing hard. His face was burning hot. He hated conflicts, fights; hated them so deeply, felt so inadequate when himself involved, that emotion usually overcame him. Therefore he fought rather frequently, and, on occasions, rather effectively. Emotion will win a fight as often as reason.

He considered getting Humphrey to one side, making him listen to reason. He dwelt on the phrase. The mere thought of Mildred being driven back into that house, into the hands of her legal husband, stirred that tendency to sob. He set his teeth on it. They could take her back to the rooms. He would move out. For that matter, if it would save her reputation, they could both move out. At once. But would it save her reputation?

He took off his hat; pressed a hand to his forehead; then fussed with his little moustache. Then, as a new thought was born in his brain, born of his emotions, he gave a little start. He looked back at the shadowy group about the Ames's horse block. Apparently they hadn't

moved. He looked at his shoes, tennis shoes with rubber soles.

He laid hat and stick on the ground by a tree; went a little way up the street, past the circle of the corner light and slipped across; moved swiftly, keeping on the grass, around to the alley, came in at the Henderson's back gate, made his way to the side steps.

There was a door here that led into an entry. There were doors to kitchen and dining-room on right and left, and the back stairs. Henry knew the house. Kitchen and dining-room were both dark now, but the lights were on in parlour and hall.

He got the screen door open without a sound and felt his way into and through the dining-room. It seemed to him that there were a great many chairs in that dining-room. His shins bumped them. They met his outspread hands. Between this room and the parlour the sliding doors were shut.

He stood a moment by these doors, wondering if Arthur V. Henderson was still sitting on the top step with his back to the front screen door. Probably. He couldn't very well move without some noise. But it would be impossible to see him out there, with the parlour light on.

Deliberately, with extreme caution, Henry slid back one of the doors. It rumbled a little. He waited, keeping back in the dark, and listened. There was no sound from the porch.

The piano stood against the side wall, near the front. On it lay Humphrey's straw hat. Any one by merely looking into it could have seen the initials. And the man on the steps had only to turn his head and look in through the bay window to see piano, hat, and any one who stood near, any one, in fact, in that diagonal half of the room.

Henry held his breath and stepped in, nearly to the centre of the room. Here he hesitated.

Then beginning slowly, not unlike the sound of a wagon rolling over a distant bridge, a rumbling fell on his ears. It grew louder. It ended in a little bang.

4

Henry glanced behind him. The sliding door had closed. There was a scuffling of feet on the steps.

Henry reached up and switched off the electric lamp in the chandelier.

Then he stepped forward, found the piano, felt along the top, closed his fingers on the hat, and stood motionless. His first thought was that he would probably be shot.

There were steps on the porch. The front door opened and closed. Mr Henderson was standing in the hall now, but not in the parlour doorway. Probably just within the screen door. The hall light put him at a disadvantage; and he couldn't turn it out without crossing that parlour doorway.

'Who's there!' Mr Henderson's voice was quiet enough. It sounded tired, and nervous. 'Come out o' there quick! Whoever you are!'

Henry was silent. He wasn't particularly frightened. Not now. He even felt some small relief. But he was confronted with some difficulty in deciding what he ought to do.

'Come out o' there!'

Then Henry replied: 'All right.' And came to the hall doorway.

Mr Henderson was leaning a little forward, fists clenched, ready for a spring. He still had the cigar in his mouth. But he dropped back now and surveyed the youth who stood, white-faced, clasping a straw hat tightly under his left arm. He seemed to find it difficult to speak; shifted the cigar about his mouth with mobile lips. He even thrust his hands into his pockets and looked the youth up and down.

'I came for this hat,' said Henry. 'It was on the piano.'

Still Mr Henderson's eyes searched him up and down. Eyes that would be sleepy again as soon as this little surprise was over. And they were red, with puffs under them. He was a tall man, with big athletic shoulders and deep chest, but with signs of a beginning corpulence, the

physical laxity that a good many men fall into who have been athletes in their teens and twenties but are now getting on into the thirties.

It was understood here and there in Sunbury that he had times of drinking rather hard. Indeed, the fact had been dwelt on by one or two tolerant or daring souls who ventured to speak a word for his wife. She had always quickly and willingly given her services as pianist at local entertainments. Perhaps because, with all her brisk self-possession, she must have been hungry for friends. She played exceptionally well, with some real style and with an almost perverse touch of humour. She was quick, crisp, capable. She disliked banality. To the initiated her playing of Chopin was a joy. The sentimentalists said that she had technique but no feeling. She could really play Bach. And I think she was the most accomplished accompanist that ever lived in Sunbury; certainly the best within my memory.

'Say'—thus Mr Henderson now—'you're Henry Calverly, aren't you?'

'Yes.'

'Well, I'd like to know what you're doing here.'

'I told you. I came for this hat.'

'Your hat?'

'Didn't you see the initials?'

'No. I noticed the hat there. Why didn't you come in the front way? What's all this burglar business?'

Henry didn't answer.

'I'll have to ask you to answer that question. You seem to forget that this is my house.'

'No, I don't forget that.'

Mr Henderson took out his cigar; turned it in his fingers. Colour came to his face. He spoke abruptly, in a suddenly rising voice.

'Seems to me there's some mighty queer goings-on around here. Sneaking in at two in the morning!'

'It isn't two in the morning.'

'Dam' near it.'

'It isn't half-past one. I tell you——' Henry paused. His position seemed rather weak.

Mr Henderson studied his cigar again. He drew a cigar case from an inside pocket.

'I don't know's I offered you one,' he said. He almost muttered it.

'I don't smoke,' said Henry shortly.

Mr Henderson resumed the excited tone. It was curious coming in that jumpy way. Even Henry divined the weakness back of it and grew calmer.

'I've been out on——' He paused. Mildred had trained him not to use the phrase, 'on the road.' He resumed with, '—on a business trip. More'n a month. I swan, I'm tired out. Way trains and country hotels. Fierce! If I seem nervous. . . . Look here, you seem pretty much at home! Perhaps you'll tell me where my wife is!'

Henry considered this. Shook his head.

'Trying to make me think you don't know, eh!'

'I do know.'

Mr Henderson knit his brows over this. Then, instead of immediately pressing the matter, he took out a fresh cigar and lighted it with the butt of the old one.

'Seems to me you ought to tell me,' he said then.

'I can't.'

'That's queer, ain't it?'

'Well, it's true. I can't.'

'She wrote me that she had Corinne Doag visiting here.'

'Yes. She's here.'

'With my wife? Now?'

Henry bowed. He felt confused, and more than a little tired. And he disliked this man, deeply. Found him depressing. But outwardly—he didn't himself dream this—he presented a picture of austere dignity. An effect that was intensified, if anything, by his youth.

'Anybody else with her and Corinne?'

Henry bowed again.

'A man?'

'Yes.' Henry was finding him disgusting now. But he must be extremely careful. An unnecessary word might hurt Mildred or Humphrey. Good old Hump!

Mr Henderson turned the fresh cigar round and round,

looking intently at it. In a surprisingly quiet manner he asked :—

'Why doesn't she come home?'

Henry looked at the man. Anger swelled within him.

'Because you're here?' He bit the sentence off.

He felt stifled. He wanted to run out, past the man, and breathe in the cool night air.

Mr Henderson looked up, then down again at the cigar. Then he pushed open the screen door.

'May as well sit down and talk this over,' he said. 'Cooler on the porch. Dam' queer line o' talk. You're young, Calverly. You don't know life. You don't understand these things. My God! When I think . . . Well, what is it? You seem to be in on this. Speak out! Tell me what she wants. That's one thing about me—I'm straight out. Fair and square. Give and take. I'm no hand for beating about the bush. Come on with it. What does she think I ought to do?'

'I can't tell you what she thinks.' Henry was downright angry now.

'Oh, yes! It's easy for you! You haven't been through . . .' His face seemed to be working. And his voice had a choke in it. 'But how could a kid like you understand! How could you know the way you get tied up and . . . all the little things . . . My God, man! It hurts. Can you understand that. It's tough.' He subsided. Finally, after a long silence, he said huskily but quietly, with resignation, 'You'd say I ought to go.'

Henry was silent.

Mr Henderson got up.

'I guess I know how to be a sport,' he said.

He went into the house, and in a few minutes returned with his suit-case.

'It's—it's sorta like leaving things all at loose ends,' he remarked. 'But then—of course . . .'

He went down two or three steps; then paused and looked up at Henry, who had risen now.

'You'—his voice was husky again—'you staying here?'

'No,' said Henry; and walked a way up the street with him.

Mr Henderson said, rather stiffly, that the hot spell really seemed to be over. Been fierce. Especially through Iowa and Missouri. No lake breeze, or anything like that. Muggy all the time. That was the thing here in Sunbury —the lake breeze.

5

They were still in front of the Ames place. But Mildred had risen. They stood watching him as he came, carrying the hat.

'Where on earth have you been?' asked Corinne.

Henry met with difficulty in replying. He was embarrassed, caught in an uprush of self-consciousness. He couldn't see why there need be talk. He gave Humphrey his hat.

'How'd you get this?'

'In there.'

'You went in?' This from Mildred. He felt her eyes on him.

'Yes.'

'But you—you must have . . .'

'He's gone.'

'Gone!'

'Yes.'

'But where?'

'I don't know.'

'What did you tell him?' asked Corinne sharply.

'Nothing. I don't think I did. Nothing much.'

'But what?'

'Well, he acted funny. I wouldn't tell him where Mildred was. Then he asked why you didn't come home and I said because he was there.'

Mildred and Corinne looked at each other.

'But what made him go?' asked Corinne.

'I don't know. He wanted to know what you wanted him to do, Mildred. Of course I couldn't say anything to that. And then he said he guessed he knew how to be a sport, and went and got his suit-case.'

'Hope he had sense enough not to go to the hotel,' Corinne mused, aloud. 'They'd talk so.'

'There's a train back to Chicago at two-something,' said Humphrey.

They moved slowly toward the house. At the steps they paused.

The university clock struck two.

They listened. The reverberations of the second stroke died out. The maple leaves overhead rustled softly. From the beach, a block away, came the continuous low sound of little waves on shelving sand. The great lake that washes and on occasions threatens the shore at Sunbury had woven, from Henry's birth, a strand of colour in the fibre of his being. He felt the lake as deeply as he felt the maples and oaks of Sunbury; memories of its bars of crude wonderful colour at sunset and sunrise, of its soft mists, its yellow and black November storms, its reaches of glacier-like ice-hills in winter, of moonlit evenings with a girl on the beach when the romance of youth shimmered in boundless beautiful mystery before half-closed eyes—these were an ever-present element in the undefined, moody ebb and flow of impulse, memory, hope, desire and spasmodic self-restraint that Henry would have referred to, if at all, as his mind.

'It's late enough,' said Corinne, with a little laugh.

Mildred turned away, placed a tiny foot on the bottom step, sighed, then murmured, very low, 'Hardly worth while going in.'

'Let's not,' muttered Humphrey.

'Listen.' Thus Corinne. She was leaning against the railing, with an extraordinarily graceful slouch. She had never looked so pretty, Henry thought. A little of the corner light reached her face, illuminating her velvet clear skin and shining on her blue black hair where it curved over her forehead. She made you think of health and of wild things. And she could, even at this time, earn her living. There was an offer now to tour the country forty weeks with a lyceum concert company. The letter had come to-day; Henry had seen it. She thought she wouldn't accept. Her idea was another year to study,

then two or three years abroad and, possibly, a start in the provincial opera companies of Italy, Austria, and Germany. Yes, she had character of the sort that looks coolly ahead and makes deliberate plans. Despite her wide, easy-smiling mouth and her great languorous black eyes and her lazy ways, even Henry could now see this strength in her face, in its solid, squared-up framework. More than any girl Henry had ever known she could do what she chose. Men pursued her, of course. All the time. There were certain extremely persistent ones. And it came quietly through, bit by bit, that she knew them pretty well, knocked around the city with them, as she liked. But now she had chosen himself. No doubt about it.

She said :—

'Listen. Let's go down to the shore and watch for the sunrise. We couldn't sleep a wink after—after this—anyway.'

'Nobody'd ever know,' breathed Mildred.

Humphrey took her arm. They moved slowly down the walk toward the street.

Corinne, still leaning there, looked at Henry.

He reached toward her, but she evaded him and waltzed slowly away over the grass, humming a few bars of the *Myosotis*.

Henry's eyes followed her. He felt the throbbing again in his temples, and his cheeks burned. He compressed his lips. He moved after her. He was in a state of all but ungovernable excitement, but the elation of two hours back had gone, flattened out utterly. He felt deeply uncomfortable. It was the sort of ugly moment in which he couldn't have faced himself in a looking-glass. For Henry had such moments, when, painfully bewildered by the forces that nature implants in the vigorously young, he loathed himself. Life opened, a black precipice, before him, yet Life, in other guise, drove him on. As if intent on his destruction.

He hung back; let Corinne glide on just ahead of him, still slowing revolving, swaying, waltzing to the soft little tune she was so musically humming. He wanted to watch

her; however great his discomfort of the spirit, to exult in her physical charm.

On the earlier occasion when she had overtaxed his emotional capacity he had got out of it by using the forces she stirred in him as a stimulant. But now he wasn't stimulated. Not, at least, in that way. His spirit seemed to be dead. Only his body was alive. All the excitement of the evening had played with cumulative force on his nerves. He had arrived at an emotional crisis; and was facing it sullenly but unresistingly.

The picture of Mildred and Humphrey lost in each other's gaze—in the window-seat at the rooms, on the Ames's horse block—kept coming up in his mind. He could see them in the flesh, walking on ahead, arm in arm, but still more vividly he could see them as they had been before he went back to Mildred's house. He knew that love had come to them. He wondered, trembling with the excitement of the mere thought, how it would seem to live through that miracle. No such magic had fallen upon him. . Not since the days of Ernestine. And that had been pretty youthful business. This matter of Corinne was quite different. He sighed. Then he hurried up to her, gripped her arm, walked close beside her.

At the beach they paired off as a matter of course. Henry and Corinne sat in the shadow of a breakwater. Humphrey and Mildred walked on to another breakwater.

Corinne made herself comfortable with her head resting on Henry's arm.

He was thinking, 'Sort of thing you dream of without ever expecting it really. Ain't a fellow in town that wouldn't envy me.' But gloom was settling over his spirit like a fog. It seemed to him that he ought to be whispering skilful little phrases, close to her ear. He couldn't think of any.

He bent over her face; looked into it; smoothed her dusky hair away from her temples.

He began humming: 'I arise from dreams of thee.' She picked it up, very softly, in a floating, velvety pianissimo.

His own voice died out. He couldn't sing.

He felt almost despondent. What was the matter with him! Time passed. Now and then she hummed other songs—bits of Schumann and Franz. Schubert's *Serenade* she sang through.

'Sing with me,' she murmured.

He shook his head. 'Sometimes I feel like singing, and sometimes I don't.'

'Don't I make you feel like singing, Henry?'

'Oh yes, sure!'

'You're a moody boy, Henry.'

'Oh yes, I'm moody.'

She closed her eyes. He watched the dim vast lake for a while; then, finding her almost limp in his arms, bent again over her face. 'I'm a fool,' he thought. He could have sobbed again. He bit his lip. Then kissed her. It was the first moment he had been able to. Her hand slipped over his shoulder; her arm tightened about his neck.

Abruptly he stopped; raised his head, a bitter question in his eyes.

6

A faint light was creeping over the bowl-like sky. And a fainter colour was spreading upward from the eastern horizon. The thousands of night stars had disappeared, leaving only one, the great star of the morning. It sent out little points of light, like the Star of the East in Sunday school pictures. It seemed to stir with white incandescence.

Henry straightened up; gently placed Corinne against the breakwater; covered his face.

She considered him from under lowered eyelids. Her face was expressionless. She didn't smile. And she wasn't singing now. She smoothed out her skirt, rather deliberately and thoughtfully.

'Think of it!' Henry broke out with a shudder. 'It's a dreadful thing that's happened!'

'It might be,' said Corinne very quietly, 'if Arthur didn't have the sense to take that train.'

'And we're sitting here as if——'

'Listen! What on earth made you go back to the house?'

'I can't tell you. I don't know. I *had* to.'

'Hm! You certainly did it. You're not lacking courage, Henry.'

He said nothing to this. He didn't feel brave.

'Mildred was foolish. She shouldn't have let herself get so stirred up. She ought to have gone back.'

'How can you say that! Don't you see that she *couldn't*!'

'Yes, I saw that she couldn't. But it was a mistake.'

Henry was up on his knees, now, digging sand and throwing it.

'It was love,' he said hotly—'real love.'

'It's a wreck,' said she.

'It can't be. If they love each other!'

'This town won't care how much they love each other. And there are other things. Money.'

'Bah! What's money!'

'It's a lot. You've got to have it.'

'Haven't you any ideals, Corinne?'

She reflected. Then said, 'Of course.' And added: 'She had Arthur where she wanted him. That's why he went away, of course. He thought she'd caught him. Now she's lost her head and let him get away. Dished everything. No telling what he'll do when he finds out.'

'He mustn't find out.' Henry was not aware of any inconsistency within himself.

'He will if she's going to lose her head like this. There are some things you have to stand in this world. One of the things Mildred had to stand was a husband.'

'But how could she go back to him—to-night—feeling this way?'

'She should have.'

'You're cynical.'

'I'm practical. Do you want her to go through a divorce, and then marry Humphrey? That'll take money. It's a luxury. For rich folks.'

'Don't say such things, Corinne!'

'Why not. She's made the break with Arthur. Now the next thing's got to happen. What's it to be?'

Henry got to his feet. He gazed a long time at the morning star.

The university clock struck three.

Henry shivered.

'Come,' he said. 'Let's get back.' It didn't occur to him to help her up.

The four of them lingered a few moments at Mildred's door. Humphrey finally led Mildred in. For a last good-night, plainly.

Corinne smiled at Henry. It was an odd, slightly twisted smile.

'After all,' she murmured, 'there's no good in taking things too seriously.'

He threw out his hands.

'You think I'm hard,' she said, still with that smile.

'Don't! Please!'

'Well—good-night. Or good-morning.'

She gave him her hand. He took it. It gripped his firmly, lingeringly. He returned the pressure; coloured; gripped her hand hotly; moved toward her, then sprang away and dropped her hand.

'Why—Henry!'

'I'm sorry. I don't know what's the matter with me. I was looking at that star——'

'I saw you looking at it.'

'I was thinking how white it was. And bright. And so far away. As if there wasn't any use trying to reach it. And then—oh, I don't know—Mr Henderson made me blue, the way he looked to-night. And Humphrey and Mildred—the awful fix they're in. And you and me—I just can't tell you!'

'You're telling me plainly enough,' she said wearily.

'Do you ever hate yourself?'

She didn't answer this. Or look up.

'Did you ever feel that you might turn out just—oh well, no good? Mr Henderson made me think that.'

'He isn't much good,' said she.

'As if your life wasn't worth making anything out of? Your friends ashamed of you? They talk about me here

now. And I haven't been bad. Not yet. Just one or two little things.'

Her lips formed the words, in the dark, 'You're not bad.'

Then she said, rather sharply: 'Don't stand there looking like a whipped dog, Henry.'

'I'll go,' he said; and turned.

'You're the strangest person I ever knew,' she said. 'Maybe you *are* a genius. Considering that Mildred completely lost her nerve, your handling of Arthur came pretty near being it. I wonder.'

Humphrey and Mildred came out.

She came straight to him; gave him both her hands.

'You've settled everything for us. Humphrey, I want to kiss Henry. I'm going to.'

Henry received the kiss like an image. Then he and Humphrey went away together into the dawn.

'No good going to the rooms now,' Humphrey remarked. 'Let's walk the beach.'

Henry nodded dismally.

7

The sky out over the lake was a luminous vault of deep rose shading off into the palest pink. The flat surface of the water, as far as they could see, was like burnished metal.

Henry flung out a trembling arm.

'Look!' he said huskily. 'That star.'

It was still incandescent, still radiating its little points of light.

'Hump,' he said, a choke in his voice—'I'm shaken. I'm beginning life again to-night, to-day.'

'I'm shaken too, Hen. The real thing has come. At last. It's got me. It'll be a fight, of course. But we're going through with it. I want you to come to know her better, Hen. Even you—you don't know. She's wonderful. She's going to help with my work in the shop, help me do the real things, creative work, get away from grubbing jobs.'

It was a moment of flashing insight for Henry. He couldn't reply; couldn't even look at his friend. His misgivings were profound. Yet the thing was done. Humphrey's life had taken irrevocably a new course. No good even wasting regrets on it. So he fell, in a tumbling rush of emotion, to talking about himself.

'I'm beginning again. I—I let go a little. Hump, I can't do it. It's too strong for me. I go to pieces. You don't know. I've got to fight—all the time. Do the things I used to do—make myself work hard, hard. Keep accounts. Every penny. Leave girls alone. It means grubbing. I can't bear to think of it.' He spread out his hands. 'In some ways it seems to help to let go. You know—stirs me. Brings the Power. Makes me want to write, create things. But it's too much like burning the candle at both ends.'

Humphrey got out his old cob pipe, and carefully scraped it.

'That's probably just what it is,' he remarked.

'Oh, Hump, what is it makes us feel this way! You know—girls, and all that.'

Humphrey lighted his pipe.

'You don't know how it makes me feel to see you and Mildred. Just the way she looks. And you. Corinne and I don't look like that. We were flirting. I didn't mean it. She didn't, either. It's been beastly. But still it didn't seem beastly all the time.'

'It wasn't,' said Humphrey, between puffs. 'Don't be too hard on yourself. And you haven't hurt Corinne. She likes you. But just the same, she's only flirting. She'd never give up her ambitions for you.'

'There's something I want to feel. Something wonderful. I've been thinking of it, looking at that star. I want to love like—like that. Or nothing.'

Humphrey leaned on the railing over the beach, and smoked reflectively. The rose tints were deepening into scarlet and gold. The star was fading.

'Hen,' said Humphrey, speaking out of a sober reverie, 'I don't know that I've ever seen anybody reach a star. Our lives, apparently, are passed right here on this earth.

Henry couldn't answer this. But he felt himself in opposition to it. His hands were clenched at his side.

'I begin my life to-day,' he thought.

But back of this determination, like a dark current that flowed silently but irresistibly out of the mists of time into the mists of other time, he dimly, painfully knew that life, the life of this earth, was carrying him on. And on. As if no resolution mattered very much. As if you couldn't help yourself, really.

He set his mouth. And thrust out his chin a little. He had not read Henley's *Invictus*. It would have helped him, could he have seen it just then.

'Let's walk,' he said.

They breakfasted at Stanley's.

Here there was a constant clattering of dishes and a smell of food. People drifted in and out—men who worked along Simpson Street, and a few family groups—said 'Good-morning. Looks like a warm day.' Picked their teeth. Paid their checks to Mrs Stanley at the front table, or had their meal tickets punched.

They walked slowly up the street as far as the Sunbury House corner, and crossed over to the *Voice* office. Each glanced soberly at the hotel as they passed.

They went in through the railing that divided front and rear offices. Humphrey took off his coat and dropped into his swivel chair before the roll-top desk. Henry took off his and dropped on the kitchen chair before the littered pine table. Jim Smith, the foreman, came in, his bare arms elaborately tattooed, chewing tobacco, and told 'a new one,' sitting on the corner of Henry's table. Henry sat there, pale of face, toying with a pencil, and wincing.

After Jim had gone, Henry sat still, gazing at the pencil, wondering weakly if the rough stuff of life was too much for him.

He glanced over toward the desk. Humphrey, pipe in mouth, was already at work. Hump had the gift of instant concentration. Even this morning, after all that had happened, he was hard at it. Though he had something to work for.

A sob was near. Henry had to close his eyes for a moment. His sensitive lips quivered.

Humphrey would be seeing his Mildred again at the close of the day. Henry found himself entertaining the possibility of crawling shamefacedly around to Corinne.

Then he sat up stiffly. Felt in one pocket after another until he found a little red account-book. He hadn't made an entry for a week. Before Corinne came into his life he hadn't missed an entry for nearly two years.

He sat staring at it, pencil in hand.

His mouth set again.

He wrote :—

'Bkfst. Stanley s . . . 20 c.'

He slipped the book into his pocket; compressed his lips for an instant; then reached for a wad of copy paper.

And gave a little sigh of relief. It was to be a long, perhaps an endless battle with self. But he had started.

V

TIGER, TIGER!

I

Miss Amelia Dittenhoefer was a figure in Sunbury. She had taught two generations of its young in the old Filbert Avenue school. And during more than ten years, since relinquishing that task, she had supplied the 'Society,' 'Church Doings,' 'Woman's Realm,' and 'Personal Mention' departments of the *Voice* with their regular six to eight columns of news and gossip.

And as several hundred Sunbury men and women had once been her boys and girls, this sort of personal news came to her from every side. Her 'children,' of whatever present age, accepted her as an institution, like the university building, General Grant, or Lake Michigan. She never had a desk in the *Voice* office, but worked at home or moving briskly about the town. Home, to her, was the rather select, certainly high-priced boarding-house of Mrs Clark on Simpson Street, over by the lake, where she had lived, at this time, for twenty-one or twenty-two years. She was little, neat, precise, and doubtless (as I look back on those days) equipped for much more important work than any she ever found to do in Sunbury. But Woman's sun had hardly begun to rise then.

As Henry had been, at the age of six, one of her boys, and during the past two years had shared with her the reporting work of the *Voice*, it was not unnatural that she should stop him as he was hurrying, airily twirling his thin bamboo stick, over to Stanley's restaurant. It was noontime. Simpson Street was quiet. They walked along past Donovan's drug store and Jackson's book store (formerly B. F. Jones's) and turned the corner. Here, in front of an unfrequented photographer's studio, Miss

Dittenhoefer stated her problem. She looked, though her trim little person was erect as always, rather beaten down.

'Mr Boice has taken half my work, Henry—"Church Doings" and "Society." He sent me a note. I gather that you're to do it.'

'Me?' Henry spoke in honest amazement.

'Doubtless. He's cutting down expenses. I mind, of course, after all these years. I've worked very hard. And on the money side, I shall mind a little.'

'You don't mean——'

'Oh, yes. Half the former wage. And they don't pension old teachers in Sunbury. But this is what I want to tell you——'

'Oh, but Miss Dittenhoefer, I don't——'

'Never mind, Henry; it's done. Of course I shouldn't have said as much as this. Though perhaps I had to say it to somebody. Forget what you can of it. But now—I wanted to give you this list. There's a good lot of society for summer. Never knew the old town to be so gay. Two or three things in South Sunbury that are important. They feel that we've been slighting them down there this year. I've noted everything down. And I've written the church societies, asking them to send announcements direct to the office after this.'

'I don't want your work,' said Henry, colouring up. 'It ain't—isn't—square.'

'But it's business, Henry. Mr Boice explained that in his note. You'll find I've written everything out in detail—all my plans and the right ladies to see. Good-bye now.'

Henry, pained, unable to believe that Miss Dittenhoefer's day could pass so abruptly, walked moodily back to Stanley's and, as usual, bolted his lunch. The unkindness to Miss Dittenhoefer directly affected himself. It meant still more of the routine desk-work and more running around town.

Then, slowly, as he sat there staring at the pink mosquito-bar that was gathered round the chandelier, his eyes filled. It was hard to believe that even Mr Boice could do a thing like that to Miss Dittenhoefer. Coolly cutting

her pay in half! It seemed to Henry wanton cruelty. It suggested to his sensitive mind other tales of cruelty—tales of the boys who had gone into Chicago wholesale houses for their training and had found their fresh young dream-ideals harshly used in the desperate struggle of business.

Henry, I am certain, thought of Mr Boice at this moment with about as much sympathy as a native of a jungle village might feel for a man-eating tiger. That look about Miss Dittenhoefer's mouth when she smiled! It was a world, this of placid-appearing Sunbury and the big city just below the town line, in which men fought each other to the death, in which young boys were hardened and coarsened and taught to kill or be killed, in which women were tortured by hard masters until their souls cried out.

Boice, I am sure, sensed nothing of this somewhat morbid hostility. No; until Robert A. McGibbon turned up in Sunbury, Mr Boice had some reason to feel settled and complacent in his years. His private funds were secure in his wife's name. And he had every reason to believe that, before many months more, it would be his privilege and pleasure to run McGibbon out of town for good. If the matter of Miss Dittenhoefer should, for a little while, stir up sentimental criticism, why—well, it was business. Sound business. And you couldn't go back of sound business.

Henry sighed, got slowly up, had his meal ticket punched at the desk by Mrs Stanley, went back to the office.

2

The sunny, listless July day was at its lowest ebb—when men who had the time dawdled and smoked late over their lunch, when ladies took naps.

Flies crawled languidly about the speckled walls of the *Voice* office. Outside the screen door and the plate-glass front window, the hot air, rising from the cement sidewalk, quivered so that the yellow outlines of the Sunbury House across the street wavered unstably, and the dusty

trees over there wavered, and the men sitting coatless, suspendered, in the yellow rocking chairs on the long veranda, wavered. Through the open press-room door came the sound of one small job-press rumbling at a hand-bill job; the other presses were still. The compositors worked or idled without talking.

Here in the office, Henry, tipped back in his kitchen chair before the inkstained, cluttered pine table by the end wall, coat off, limp wet handkerchief tucked carefully around his neck inside the collar, chewed a pencil, gazing now at the little pile of blank copy paper before him, now at a discouraged fly on the wall. Gradually the fly took on a perverse interest among his wandering, unhappy thoughts. Prompted, doubtless, by a sense of inner demoralisation that was now close to recklessness, he reached for a pen, filled it with ink, and shot a scattering volley at the slow-moving insect.

At the roll-top desk by the press-room door, Humphrey Weaver, also coatless, cob pipe in mouth, long lean face wrinkled in the effort to keep his usually docile mind on its task, elbow on desk and long fingers spread through damp hair, was correcting proof.

Mr Boice's desk, up in the front window, outside the railing, stood vacant. The proprietor might or might not stop in on the early-afternoon trip from his house on Upper Chestnut Avenue to the post-office. Mr Boice could do as he liked. His time was his own. He lived on the labour of others. A fact which often stirred up in Henry's breast a rage that was none the less bitter because it was impotent. It was the sort of thing, he felt, in his more nearly lucid moments, that you have to stand—the wall against which you must beat your head year after year.

Henry, victorious over the fly, settled back. He tried to work. Then sat for a time brooding. Then, finally, turned to his friend.

'Hump,' he said, 'I—I know you wouldn't think I had much to do—I mean the way you get work done—I don't know what it is—but I wish I could see a way to begin on all this new work. I know I'm no good, but——'

'I wouldn't say that.' Humphrey, glad of a brief respite, settled back in his swivel chair. 'I could never have written that picnic story. Never in the world. We're different, that's all. You're a racer; I'm a work-horse. I don't know just what it's coming to. He isn't handling you right.'

'That's it!' Henry cried, softly, eagerly. 'He *isn't!*'

'I suppose you know now about Miss Dittenhoefer.' Henry's head bowed in assent. 'I didn't have the heart to tell you myself, Hen.' He picked up his proofs, then looked up and out of the window. 'There,' he remarked unexpectedly, 'is a pretty girl!'

Henry turned with the quickness of long habit.

'Where?' he asked, then discovered the young person in question standing on the hotel veranda talking with Mrs B. L. Ames and Mary Ames.

She was a new girl. Even now, though Henry had given up girls for good, she caused a quickening of his pulse. She *was* pretty—rather slender, in a blue skirt and a trim white shirt-waist, and an unusual amount of darkish hair that massed effectively about a face, the principal characteristics of which, at this distance and through the screen door, was a bright, almost eager smile.

It is a not uninteresting fact, to those who know something of Henry's susceptibility on previous occasions, that his gaze wandered moodily back to his table. He sighed. His hand strayed up and began pulling at his little moustache.

'You haven't told me what I'm to do about it, Hump. This society thing really stumps me.'

'I haven't known quite what to say. That's all, Hen. The old man is riding you, of course. I didn't think, when he raised you to twelve a week, that he'd just lie down and pay it. Meekly. Not he! He's a crafty old duck. Very, very crafty— Cheese it; here he comes!'

The shadow of Norton P. Boice fell across the door-step. The screen door opened with a squeak, and ponderously the quietly dominating force of Simpson Street, came in, inclined his massive head in an impersonal greeting, and lowered his huge bulk into his chair.

'Henry!' called Mr Boice in his quietly husky voice.

The young man quivered slightly, but sat motionless.

'Henry!' came the husky voice again.

There could be no pretending not to hear. Henry went over there. Mr Boice sat still—he could do that—great hands resting on his barrel-like thighs.

'I am rearranging the work of the paper—' he began.

'Yes,' muttered Henry, not without sullenness; 'I know.'

'Oh, you know!'

'Yes.'

'There's a little more for you to do. You'll have to get it cleaned up well ahead of time this week. Thursday is the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of Sunbury. You'll have to cover that. Take down what you can of the speeches.'

That seemed to be all. Henry moved slowly back to the table. After a little shuffling about of the papers on his desk, Mr Boice moved heavily out and headed toward the post-office.

Then, and not before, Henry rummaged under a pile of exchanges at the rear of the table until he found a book. This he held close to his body, where it would not be seen should Humphrey turn unexpectedly.

The book was entitled *Will Power and Self Mastery*. Opposite the title page was a half-tone reproduction of the author—a face with a huge moustache and intensely knit brows. Henry studied it, speculating in a sort of despair as to whether he could ever bring himself to look like that. He knit his own brows. His hand strayed again to his own downy moustache.

He turned the pages. Read a sentence here and there. The book, though divided under various chapter headings, was really made up of hundreds of more or less pithy little paragraphs. These paragraphs—their substance mainly a rehandling of the work of Samuel Smiles, James Parton, and the Christian and Mental Scientists (though Henry didn't know this)—might easily have been shuffled about and arranged in other sequence, so little continuity of thought did they represent. One paragraph ran: —

The express train of Opportunity stops but once at your station. If you miss it, it will never again matter that you almost caught it.

Another was :—

Practise concentration. Fix your mind on the job in hand. Aim to do it a little better than such a job was ever done before. It is related of Thomas Alva Edison that, at the early age of seven, he——

And this :—

Oh, how many a young man, standing at the parting of life's main roads, has lost for ever the golden opportunity because he stopped to light a cigarette!

Henry replaced the book under the pile of exchanges. A copy of last week's *Voice* lay there.

It was the first time he had let an issue of the paper go by without reading and re-reading every line of his own work. But he had, during these five days, passed through one of life's great revolutions. Besides, he had been put on a salary basis. When on space-rates, it had been necessary to cut everything out and paste it up into a 'string' for measurement. It came to him now, with a warm little uprush of memory, that the best piece of writing he had ever done would be in this issue.

He opened the paper. There was his story, occupying all of page three that wasn't given up to advertisements. This was better than working. Besides, he ought to go over it. He settled down to it.

3

The sound that caused Humphrey to start up in surprise was the first outbreak of profanity he had ever heard from the lips of Henry Calverly.

Henry was sitting up stiffly, holding last week's *Voice*

with hands that distinctly trembled. When Humphrey first looked, he was white, but after a moment the colour began flowing back to his face and continued flowing until his face was red. His lips were clamped tight, as if the small verbal explosion that had just passed them had proved even more startling to himself than to Humphrey.

'What is it?' asked the editor.

Henry stared at the outspread paper.

'This!' he got out. 'This—this!'

'What's the matter, Hen?'

'Don't you *know*?'

'Oh, your picnic story! Yes—but—what on earth is the matter with you?'

'You *know*, Hump! You never told me!'

'You mean the cuts?'

'Oh—yes!' This 'Oh' was a moan of anguish.

'Good heavens, Hen—you didn't for a minute think we could print it as you wrote it?' Henry's facial muscles moved, but he got no words out. Humphrey, touched, went on. 'I don't mind telling you—between ourselves—that the thing as you wrote it, every word, is the best bit of descriptive writing I've seen this year. But you wrote the real story, boy. You painted the whole Simpson Street bunch as they are—every wart. It's a savage picture. Why, we'd have dropped seventy per cent, of our advertising between Saturday and Monday! And the queer little picture of Charlie Waterhouse out behind the lemonade stand—— Why, boy, that's enough to bust open the town! With Bob McGibbon gunning for Charlie and demanding an accounting of the town money! Gee!'

Henry seemed hardly to hear this.

'Who—who re-wrote it?'

'I did some. The old man polished it off himself.'

'It's ruined!'

'Of course. But it brought you a raise to twelve a week. That's something.'

'You don't understand. It was my work. And it was true. I wrote the truth.'

'That's why.'

'Then they don't want the truth?'

'Good lord—no!'

Henry considered this, bent over as if to read further, twisted his flushed face as if in pain, then abruptly sprang up.

'What's become of it—the piece I wrote?'

'Well, Hen—I didn't feel that we had a right to destroy the thing. Too darn good! In a sense, it's the old man's property; in another sense, it's yours——'

'It's mine!'

'In a sense. At any rate, I took it on myself to have a copy made confidentially. Then I turned the original over to Mr Boice. He doesn't know.'

'Where's the copy?'

'Here in my desk.'

'Give it to me!'

'Just hold your horses a minute, Hen——'

'You give it——'

Humphrey threw up a hand, then opened a drawer. He handed over the typewritten manuscript.

'Who made this?'

'Gertie Wombast. I warned her to keep her mouth shut.'

'How much did it cost?'

'Oh, see here, Hen—I won't talk to you! Not till you get over this excitement.'

'I'm not excited. Or, at least——'

Humphrey gave a shrug. Henry, gripping the roll of manuscript, started out.

'Wait a minute, Hen! What do you think you're going to do?'

'What do you s'pose? Only one thing I *can* do!'

'Going after the old man?'

'Of course! You would yourself, if——'

'No, I wouldn't. Not in any such rush as that. It's upsetting to have your good work pawed over and cut to pieces, but twelve a week is——'

'Oh, Hump, it's everything! He's made it impossible for me. I could stand some of it, but not all this. He ain't fair! He *wants* to make it hard for me! He's just thinking up ways to be mean. And he's spoiled my work—

best thing I've ever done in my life! And now people will never know how well I can write.'

'Oh, yes, they will!'

'No, they won't. I'll never feel just that way again. It's a feeling that comes. And then it goes. You can't do anything about it. It was Corinne and the way I felt about her. And a lot o' things. Seemed to make me different. Lifted me up. I was red-hot.' He reached out and struck the paper from the table to the floor. 'You bet I'll go to old Boice! I'll tell him a thing or two! He'll know something's happened before he gets through with me. I've had something to say to him for a good while. Going to say it now. Guess he don't know I'll be twenty-one in November. Have a little money then. He can't put it over me. I'll buy his old paper. Or start another one. I'll make the town too hot for him. Thinks he owns all Sunbury. But he *don't*!'

'Hen,' said Humphrey bravely, when the irate youth paused for breath, 'you simply must not try to talk to him while you're mad as this.'

'But don't you see, Hump,' cried Henry, his face working with vexation, tears close to his eyes; 'it's just the time! When I'm mad. If I wait, I'll never say a word.'

He rolled the manuscript tightly in his hand, bit his lip, then abruptly rushed out.

'Look here,' cried Humphrey. 'Don't you go showing that——'

But the only reply was the noisy slam of the screen door.

Face set, eyes wild behind their glasses, Henry hurried down Simpson Street toward the post-office.

Miss Hemple, at the money-order window, said that Mr Boice was having a talk with Mr Waterhouse in the back office and wasn't to be disturbed.

Henry turned away. For a little time he studied the weather-chart hanging on the wall. He went to the wide front window and gazed out on the street. His determination was already oozing away. He found himself slouching and straightened up. Repeatedly he had to do this. Four

times he went back to the money-order window; four times Miss Hemple smiled and shook her head.

Martha Caldwell walked by with the two Smith girls. He thought she saw him. If so, she carefully avoided a direct glance. They still weren't speaking. At least, Martha wasn't. And to think that during three long years, except for another episode now and than, she had been his girl!

Heigh-ho! No more girls! He was through!

The Ames's carriage rolled by. Mary Ames was in it. And—apparently, unmistakably—the new girl. The girl of the Sunbury House veranda. She was chatting brightly. She *was* pretty.

He turned mournfully away. She was not for him. Once it might have been possible—back in his gay big days. But not now. Not now.

He approached the window for the sixth time. For the sixth time, Miss Hemple shook her head.

He wandered out to the door.

His chance had passed. If the old man should, at this moment, and alone, come walking out, he would say meekly, 'Good-afternoon, Mr Boice,' and hurry away. He would even try to look busy and earnest. There was shame in the thought. His mouth was drooping at the corners. All of him—body, mind, spirit—was sagging now. He moved slowly down toward the tracks, entered the little lunch-counter place there and ate a thick piece of lemon-meringue pie. Which was further weakness. He knew it. It completed his depression.

He felt that he must think. He ordered another piece of pie. He wished he hadn't said so much to Humphrey. Would he ever learn to control the spoken word? Probably not. He sighed. And ate. He couldn't very well go back to the office. Not like this—in defeat. All that work, too! Life, work, friendship, all the realities seemed to be slipping from his grasp. His thoughts were drifting off into a haze. It was an old familiar mood. It had come often during his teens. Not so much lately; but he was as helpless before it as he had been at eighteen, when he finally drifted aimlessly out of his class at the high school.

In those days, it had been his habit to wander along the beach, sit on a breakwater, let life and love and duty drift by beyond his reach. Thither he headed now by a back street. Too many people he knew along Simpson Street. Besides, he might be thrown face to face with the old man.

At the corner of Filbert Avenue he met the editor and proprietor of the *Gleaner*. He inclined his head with unconscious severity and would have passed on.

But Robert A. McGibbon came to a halt, smiled in a thin strained fashion, and glanced curiously from Henry's face to the tightly rolled manuscript in his hand and back to the face.

'Well,' he remarked, 'how's things?'

Henry wanted to be let alone. But he had never deliberately snubbed anybody in his life. He couldn't. So he, too, came to a stop.

'Oh, pretty good,' he replied.

4

He found himself, in his turn, looking Mr McGibbon over. The man was just a little seedy. He had a hand up, rubbing the back of his head under the tipped-down straw hat, and Henry noted the shiny black surface of his sleeve. He had a freckled, thinly alert face, a little pinched. His hair was straight and came down raggedly about ears and collar. Behind his gold-rimmed spectacles, small, sharp eyes, very keen, appeared to be darting this way and that, restlessly noting everything within their range of vision.

'Things going well over at the *Voice* office?' Henry was silent. He couldn't lie. 'Not going so well, eh? That's too bad. Anything special up?'

'No,' said Henry, finding his voice untrustworthy; 'nothing special.'

'What you doing now? Anything much?' Henry shook his head. 'Taking a little walk, perhaps.'

'Why—yes.'

'Mind if I walk along with you?'

'Why—no.'

They fell into step.

'Been thinking a little about you lately. Wondering if you were happy in your work over there.' Henry compressed his lips. 'Did you write the Business Men's Picnic story?' Henry was silent. 'Pretty fair job, I thought.'

'It was terrible!'

'Oh, no—not terrible. You're too hard on yourself.'

'I'm not hard on myself. It's *his* fault. He spoiled it.'

'Who—Boice? I shouldn't wonder. He could spoil *The New York Sun* in two days, with just a little rope.'

'He tore it all to pieces. I've got the real story here. I couldn't let you see it, of course.'

McGibbon glanced down at the roll of paper.

'You like to write, don't you?' Henry nodded shortly. 'Boice won't let you do it, I suppose.' Henry shook his head. 'He wouldn't. You know, there isn't really any reason why a country paper shouldn't be interesting. Play to the subscriber, you know. Boice plays to the advertiser and the county printing. Other way takes longer, takes a little more money at first, but once you get your subscriber hooked, the advertiser has to follow. Better for the long game.'

Henry was only half listening. They were crossing the Lake Shore Drive now. They stopped at the railing and looked out over the lake. Henry's thoughts were darting this way and that, searching instinctively for a weak spot in the wall of fate that had closed in on him.

'I've got a little money,' he said.

McGibbon smiled.

'Well, it has its uses.'

'I haven't quite got it. I get the interest. And they'll have to give me all of it in November. The seventh. I'll be twenty-one then.' These words seemed to reassure. Henry. 'Yes; I'll be twenty-one. It's quite a little, too. Over four thousand dollars. It was my mother's.'

'It's not to be sneezed at,' said McGibbon reflectively. 'If I had four thousand right now—or one thousand, for that matter—I could make sure of turning my corner and

landing the old *Gleaner* on Easy Street. I've had a fight with that paper. Been through a few things these eight months. But I'm gaining circulation in chunks now. Six months more, and I'll nail that gang.

'You know'—McGibbon threw a knee up on the railing and lighted a cigar—'it takes money to make money.'

'Oh, yes—of course,' said Henry.

'A thousand dollars now on the *Gleaner* would be worth ten thousand ten years from now.' He smoked thoughtfully. 'I've been watching you, Calverly. And if it wasn't so tough on you, I could laugh at old Boice. He's got a jewel in you, and he doesn't know it. I suppose he keeps you grinding—correcting proof, running around——'

'Oh, you've no idea!' Henry burst out. 'Everything! Just an awful grind! And now he expects me to cover all the "Society" and "Church Doings."'

'What! How's that? Has he come down on Miss Dittenhoefer?'

Henry swallowed convulsively and nodded.

'He's piling it all on me, and I won't stand for it. It ain't right! It ain't fair! And you bet your life he's going to hear a few things from me before this day's much older! I'm going to tell him a thing or two!'

'That's right!' said McGibbon. 'He won't respect you any the less for it.'

A silence followed. Henry stood, flushed, breathing hard through set teeth, staring out at the horizon.

'I'm going to tell you something, Calverly. And it's because I feel that you and I are going to be friends. I've known about you, of course. I know you can write. You'd do a lot to make a paper readable. Which is what a paper has got to be. But now I can see that we're going to be friends. You've confided in me. I'm going to confide in you.' He paused, blew out a long, meditative arrow of smoke, then added, 'I know a little about that story you wrote.'

'*You* do!' McGibbon slowly nodded. 'But how?'

'You must remember, Calverly, that I'm not like these small-town folks around here. I've worked at this game in New York, and I know a thing or two.'

'I've been in New York,' said Henry.

'Great town! But I don't spend my time here in day-dreams. I have my lines out all over town. There's mighty little going on that I don't know.'

'You seem to know a lot about Charlie Waterhouse.'

McGibbon smiled like a sphinx, then said:—

'I've nearly got him. Not quite, but nearly.'

'But I don't see how you could know about——'

'I told you I was going to confide in you. It's simple enough. Gertie Wombast let her sister read it—the one that works at the library. Swore her to secrecy. And—well, I board at the Wombasts'— Look here, Calverly: you'd better let me read it.'

Henry promptly surrendered it.

McGibbon laid the manuscript on his knee, lighted a fresh cigar, and gazed at the lake. Henry, all nerves, was clasping and unclasping his hands.

'Of course,' he said, 'this ain't really a finished thing, you understand. It's just as I wrote it off—fast, you know—and I haven't had a chance to correct it or——'

McGibbon raised his hand.

'No, Calverly—none of that! This is literature. Of course, old Boice couldn't print it. Never in the world. But it's sweet stuff. It's a perfect, merciless pen-picture of life on Simpson Street. And those two old crooks behind the lemonade stand—you've opened a jack-pot there. If you only knew it, son, that's evidence. Evidence! You walked right into it. Charlie Waterhouse is short in his town accounts. I know that. Boice and Weston are covering up for him. They work up this neat little purse and give it to Charlie. Why? Because he's the most popular man in Sunbury? Rot! Because they're helping him pay back. Making the town help.'

'Oh, do you really think——'

'"Think?" I know. This completes the picture. Tell me—what is Boice paying you?'

'Twelve a week, now.'

'Hm! That's quite a little for a country weekly. I could meet it, though, if—see here: What chance is there of your getting, say, a thousand of your money free and

investing in the *Gleaner*? Now, wait! I want to put this thing before you. It's the turning-point. If we act without delay, we've got 'em. We've got everything. We own the town. Here we are! The *Gleaner* is just at the edge of success. I take you over from the *Voice* at the same salary—twelve a week. I'll give you lots of rope. I won't expect routine from you. I'll expect genius. Stuff like this. The real thing. Just when it comes to you, and you feel you can't help writing. With this new evidence I can go after Charlie Waterhouse and break him. I'll finish Boice and Weston at the same time. Show up the whole outfit! Whatever'll be left of the *Voice* by that time, Boice can have and welcome. The *Gleaner* will be the only paper in Sunbury.'

'My Uncle Arthur is executor of my mother's estate.'

'You go right after him. No time to lose. We must drive this right through.'

'I'll see him to-morrow.'

'Couldn't you find him to-night?'

5

Uncle Arthur lived in Chicago, out on the West Side. It was a long ride—first by suburban train into the city, then by cable-car through miles upon miles of gray wooden tenements and dingy gray-brick tenements. You breathed in odours of refuse and smoke and coal-gas all the way.

Uncle Arthur was as thin as McGibbon, but wholly without the little gleam in the eyes that advertised the proprietor of the *Gleaner* as an eager and perhaps dangerous man. Uncle Arthur was a man of method who had worked through long years into a methodical but fairly substantial prosperity.

His thin nose was long and prominent. His brow was deeply furrowed. His gaze was critical. He believed firmly that life is a disciplinary training for some more important period of existence after death. He didn't smoke or drink. Nor would he keep in his employ those

who indulged in such practices. He was an officer of several organisations aiming at civic and social reform.

Uncle Arthur laid a pedantic stress, in all business matters, on what he called 'putting the thing right end to.' It was not unnatural, therefore, that he should receive a distinctly unfavourable impression when Henry began, with a foolish little gesture and a great deal of fumbling at his moustache, slouching in his chair, by saying :—

'There's a little chance come up—oh, nothing much, of course—for me to make a little money, sort of on the side—and you see I'll be twenty-one in November; so it's just a matter of three or four months, anyway—and I was figuring—oh, just talking the thing over——'

His voice trailed off into a mumble.

'If you would take your hand away from your mouth, Henry,' said his uncle sharply, 'perhaps I could make out what you're trying to say.'

Henry sat up with a jerk.

'Why, you see, Uncle Arthur, there's a fellow bought the old Sunbury *Gleaner* and he's awfully smart—got his training in New York—and he's brought the paper already—why, it ain't eight months!—to where he's right on the point of turning his corner. You see, a thousand dollars now may easily be worth ten thousand in a few years. The *Voice* is a rotten paper. Nobody reads the darned thing. And I can't work for old Boice, anyhow. He drives me crazy. If he'd just give me half a chance to do the kind of thing I can do best once in a while; but this——'

'Henry, are you asking me to advance you a thousand dollars of your principal?'

'Why—well, yes, if——'

'Most certainly not!'

'But, you see, it's so close to November seventh, anyway, that I thought——'

'You thought that on your twenty-first birthday I would at once close out the investments I have made with the money your mother left and hand you the principal in cash?'

Henry stared at him, his thoughts for the moment

frozen stiff. In Uncle Arthur's obstructionist attitude, so suddenly revealed, lay the promise of a new, wholly undreamed-of disappointment. It was crushing. Then, almost in the same second, it was stimulating. Henry's eyes blazed.

'You mean to say——' he began, shouting.

'I mean to say that I haven't the slightest intention of letting you squander the money your mother so painfully—'

'That's my money!'

'But I'm your uncle and your guardian——'

'You needn't think you're going to keep that one minute after November seventh!'

'I will use my judgment. I won't be dictated to by a boy who——'

'But you gotta!'

'I have not got to!'

'I won't stand for——'

'Henry, I won't have such talk here. I think you had better go.'

Henry, with a good deal of mumbling, went. He was bewildered. And the little storm of indignant anger had shaken him. He returned, during the ride back past the tenements on the jerky cable-car, through streets that swarmed with noisy, ragged children and frowsy adults and all the smells, to depression. McGibbon said that Uncle Arthur's threat to hold the money after the seventh of November was a distinct point.

'In these matters, unfortunately, where a relative or family friend has for years had charge of money belonging to others, little temptations are bound to come up. Now, your uncle may be the most scrupulously honest of men, but——'

'He has a bad eye,' Henry put in.

'I don't doubt it. Calverly. let me tell you—never forget this—a man who hesitates for one instant to account freely, fully for money is never to be trusted.'

'But what can I do?'

'Do? Everything! Just what I'm doing with Charlie Waterhouse, for one thing—insist on a full statement.'

They framed a letter—or McGibbon framed it—

demanding an accounting, 'in order that further legal measures may not become necessary.' McGibbon said he would send it early in the morning, registered, and with a special-delivery stamp. Later, they decided to add emphasis by means of a telegram demanding immediate consideration of the letter.

Late that night, when Humphrey came upstairs into a pitch-dark living-room and switched on the light, he discovered a pale youth sitting stiffly on a window-seat wide-awake, eyes staring nervously, hands clasped.

'Well, what on earth?' said he, in mild surprise.

'Oh, Hump, I've wondered what you'd think—leaving you in the lurch with all that work!'

Humphrey threw out a lean hand.

'I can manage. Get some help from one of the students. And Gertie Wombast is usually available—— Oh, say; how about the old man? Did you tell him what's what?'

Henry's burning eyes stared out of that white face. Suddenly—so suddenly that Humphrey himself started—he sprang up, cried out; 'No! No! No!' and rushed into his bedroom, slamming the door after him.

Humphrey looked soberly at the door, shook his head, filled his pipe.

That 'No! No! No!' still rang in his ears It was a cry of pain.

Humphrey had suffered; but he had never known a turbulence of the sort that every now and then seemed to tear Henry to pieces.

'Must be fierce,' he thought. 'But it works up as well as down. Runs to extremes. Creative faculty, I suppose. Well, he's got it—that's all. And he's only a kid. Thing to do's to stand by and try to steady him up a little when he comes out of it.'

And the philosophical Humphrey went to bed.

6

At noon, no word had come from Uncle Arthur. Henry, all the morning, had flitted back and forth between

McGibbon's rear office and the telegraph office in the 'depot.'

At twelve-thirty, they sent a peremptory message, demanding a reply by three o'clock. An ultimatum.

The reply came unexpectedly, with startling effect, at twenty-five minutes past two, requesting Henry to come directly into his uncle's Chicago office.

He caught the two-forty-seven. McGibbon, who had missed nothing of the concern on Henry's face at this brisk counter-offensive on the part of Uncle Arthur, was with him.

McGibbon waited in the corner drug store while Henry went up in one of the elevators of the great La Salle Street office-building.

Uncle Arthur led the way into his inner office, closed the door, seated himself, and with austerity surveyed the youth before him, taking in with deliberate thought the far-from-inexpensive blue-serge suit, the five-dollar straw hat, the bamboo stick (which Henry carried anything but airily now), and the hopelessly futile little moustache.

'Sit down,' said Uncle Arthur.

Henry sat down.

Uncle Arthur opened a drawer, took up two slips of paper, deliberately laid them before his nephew.

'There,' he said, 'is my cheque for one thousand forty-six dollars and twenty-nine cents. It is the value, with interest to this morning, of one bond which I am buying from you, at the price given in to-day's quotations. Kindly sign the receipt. Right there.'

He dipped a pen and Henry signed, then, with shaky fingers, picked up the cheque, fingered it, laid it down again.

'I want no misunderstandings about this, Henry. I am doing it because I regard you as a young fool. Perhaps you will be less of a fool after you have lost this money. Henry heard the words through a mist of confused feelings. 'I will have no more letters and telegrams like these.' He indicated the little sheaf of papers on his desk. 'And I won't have my character assailed either by you or by any cheap scoundrel whose advice you may be taking.

'But—but he's *not* a cheap scoundrel!'

Uncle Arthur raised his eyebrows. His eyes, Henry felt, would burn holes in him if he stayed here much longer.

'You're hard on me, Uncle Arthur. You're not fair! I'm *not* going to lose——'

The older man abruptly got up.

'If you care for any advice at all from me, I suggest that you insist on a note from this man—a demand note, or, at the very outside, a three-months' one. Don't put money unsecured into a weak business. Make it a personal obligation on the part of the proprietor. And now, Henry, that is all. I really don't care to talk to you further.

Henry stood still.

His uncle turned brusquely away.

'But—but—' Henry said unsteadily, 'Uncle Arthur—really! Money isn't everything!'

His uncle turned on him as if about to speak; but on second thought merely raised his eyebrows again.

And then came the final humiliation, the little climax that was always to stand out with particular vividness in Henry's memory of the scene. He turned to go. He had reached the door when he heard his uncle's voice, saying, with a rasp :—

'You have forgotten the cheque, Henry.'

And he had to go back for it.

7

One effect of the scene was a slight coolness toward McGibbon.

'I shall want your note,' he said.

McGibbon turned his head away at this and looked out of the car window. Then, a moment later, he replied :—

'Sure! Of course! It's just as I told you—always watch a man who hesitates a minute in money matters.'

'Three months,' said Henry.

'And we can arrange renewals in a friendly spirit between ourselves,' said McGibbon.

At the Sunbury station, Henry drew a little red book from his pocket, knit his brows, and said :—

'I owe you for those car fares. Two, wasn't it? Or three?'

'Oh, shucks! Don't think of that!'

'Was it two or three?'

'Well—if you really—two.'

Henry gave him a dime. Then entered the item in the small book.

'What's that?' asked McGibbon. 'Keep accounts?'

'Oh, yes,' Henry replied; 'I'm very careful about money.'

'It's a good way to be,' said McGibbon.

The *Gleaner* office was over Hemple's meat-market on Simpson Street, up a long flight of stairs. Here they paused.

'Come up,' said McGibbon jovially, 'and pick out the place for your desk.'

'No,' said Henry; 'not now. Got to hurry. But I'll be right over.'

He had to hurry, because it was nearly five o'clock, and Mr Boice might be gone. And it seemed to Henry to be important that he should have the cheque still in his pocket at the moment.

His eyes were burning again. And his brain was racing.

'Say!' he cried abruptly. 'Look here! Miss Dittenhoefer——'

Their eyes met. I think McGibbon, for the first time, really felt the emotional power that was unquestionably in Henry. His own quick eyes now took on some of that fire.

'Great!' he answered. And would have talked on, but Henry had already torn away, almost running.

He rushed past the *Gleaner* office without a glance. It suddenly didn't matter whether Mr Boice had gone or not. Henry was a firebrand now. He would unhesitatingly trail the man to his home, to the Sunbury Club, to Charlie Waterhouse's, even to Mr Weston's. The Power was on him!

Mr Boice had not gone. Even twenty minutes later, when Henry came into the office, he was still at his desk. Over it, between the dusty pile of the *Congressional Record* and the heap of ancient zinc etchings, his thick gray hair could be seen.

Henry entered, head erect, tread firm, marched in through the gate in the railing to his table, rummaged through the heaps of old exchanges, proofs, hand-bills, and programmes for a book that was there, and certain other little personal possessions. The two pencils and one penholder were his. Also, a small glass inkstand. He gathered these up, made a parcel in a newspaper. He felt Humphrey's eyes on him. He heard old Boice move.

Then came the husky voice.

'Henry!' He went on tying the parcel. 'Henry—come here!'

He turned to his friend.

'Gotta do it, Hump. Tell you later.'

Then he moved deliberately to the desk out front, rested an elbow on it, looked down at the bulky, motionless figure sitting there.

'Where've you been?' asked Mr Boice.

'Been attending to my own affairs.'

'How do you expect your work to be done? The fiftieth anniversary of——'

'I haven't any work here.'

'Oh, you haven't?'

'No. Through with you. You owe me a little for this week, but I don't want it. Wouldn't take it as a gift.' His voice was rising. He could feel Humphrey's eyes over the top of his desk. And a stir by the press-room door told him that Jim Smith was listening there, with two or three compositors crowding up behind him. 'Not as a gift. It's dirty money. I'm through with you. You and your crooked crowd!'

'Oh, you are?'

'Yes. Through with you. I'm on a decent paper now. A paper that ain't afraid to print the truth.'

Mr Boice, still motionless, indulged his only nervous affection, making little sounds.

'Mmm!' he remarked. 'Hmm! Ump! Mmm!' Then he said, 'Meaning the *Gleaner*, I presume.'

'Meaning the *Gleaner*.'

'I suppose you know that McGibbon's slated to fail within the month. He can't so much as meet his pay-roll.'

'I know more'n that!' cried Henry, laughing nervously. 'I know he's got money because I put some in to-day. Miss Dittenhoefer's quitting you this week, too. She's enthusiastic about us. I've just seen her. We're going to have a big property there. We'll buy you out one o' these days for a song. Then it'll be the *Gleaner and Voice*. See? But, first, we're going to clean up the town. You and Charlie Waterhouse and that old whited sepulchre in the bank! I'll show you you can't fool with me!'

It was very youthful. Henry wished, in a swift review, that he had thought up something better and rehearsed it.

Then he saw the eyes of the huge, still man waver down to his desk. And his heart bounded.

'He's afraid of me!' ran his thoughts. 'I've licked him!'

It was the time to leave. Parcel under arm, he strode out.

Out on the sidewalk, he laughed aloud. Which wouldn't do. He was a business man now. With investments. He mustn't go grinning down Simpson Street.

But it was worth a thousand dollars. Just to feel this way once.

Jim Smith, out of breath, came sidling up to the corner. He had run around through the alley.

He wrung Henry's hand.

'Great!' he cried. 'Soaked it to the old boy, you did! Makes me think of a story. Maybe you've heard this one. If you have, just——'

A hand fell on Henry's shoulder.

It was Humphrey, hatless. He must have walked out right past Mr Boice. His face wrinkled into a grin.

'My boy,' he said, 'right here and now I thank you for the joy you've brought into my young life. The impossible has happened. The beautifully impossible. It was great.'

'Well,' cried Henry, beaming, unstrung, a touch of nervous aggression in his voice, 'I said it!'

'Oh, you said it!' cried Humphrey.

Thus Henry closed a door behind him. And treading the air, trying desperately to control the upward-twitching corners of his mouth, humming the wedding-march from *Lohengrin* to the familiar words :—

Here comes the bride—
Get on *to* her stride!

—he marched, a conqueror, down Simpson Street. Yes, it was worth a thousand.

Back in the old *Voice* office, Mr Boice sat motionless, big hands sprawling across his thighs, making little sounds.

I think he was trying, in his deliberate way, to figure out what had happened. But he never succeeded in figuring it out. Not this particular incident. He couldn't know that it is as well to face a tigress as an artist whose mental offspring you have injured.

No; to him, Henry, the boy of the silly little cane and the sillier moustache, had stepped out of character. He couldn't know that Henry, the drifting, helpless youth, and Henry the blazing artist were two quite different persons. In Mr Boice's familiar circles they played duplicate whist and talked business, but they were not acquainted with the mysteries of dual personality such as appear in the case of any genius, great or small.

Nor (for the excellent reason that he had never heard of William Blake or his works) did the immortal line come to mind :—

Did He who made the lamb make thee?

Mr Boice was obliged to give it up.

VI

ALADDIN ON SIMPSON STREET

I

ELBERFORCE JENKINS was the most accomplished very young man-about-town in Sunbury. He appeared to have, even at twenty-one, the bachelor gift. He danced well. His golf was more than promising. He had lately taken up polo with the Dexter Smith boys and young de Casselles. He owned two polo ponies, a schooled riding horse, and a carriage team which he drove to a high cart. His allowance from his father by far overcame the weakness of his salary (he was with his brother, Jefferson, in a bond house on La Salle Street). His aptitude at small talk amounted to a gift. He liked, inevitably, the play that was popular and (though he read little) the novel that was popular. His taste in girls pointed him unerringly toward the most desirable among the newest.

He and Henry had been together in high school (Sunbury was democratic then). They had played together in the football team. They had—during one hectic month—been rivals for the hand of Ernestine Lambert.

In that instance, in so far as success had come, it had come to Henry. But those were Henry's big days, when he was directing *Iolanthe*, the town at his feet. Life, these two years, had flowed swiftly on. The long dangling figure of Elbow Jenkins had filled out. His crude boyishness had given way to a smiling reserve. He was a young man of the world—self-assured, never indiscreet of tongue, always well-mannered, never individual or interesting.

While Henry still worked on Simpson Street. He hadn't struck his gait. He was—if you bothered, these days, to think about him—a little queer. He wore that small moustache and a heavy cord hanging from his nose-glasses,

and dressed a thought too conspicuously. As if impelled by some inner urge to assert a personality that might otherwise be overlooked . . . . As I glance back upon the Henry of this period, it seems to me that there was more than a touch of pathos about that moustache. It was such a soft little thing. He fussed with it so much, and kept trying to twist it up at the ends. He didn't seem to know that they weren't twisting moustaches up at the ends that year. In fact, I think he lacked almost utterly the gift of conformity which was the strongest element in Elbow Jenkins's nature. And he never acquired it. In education, in work and preparation for life, he went it alone, stumbling, blundering, doing apparently stupid things, acting from baffling obscure motives, then suddenly coming through with an unexpected flash of insight and power.

From the period of Ernestine Lambert to the time of the present story Elbow Jenkins had been on Henry's nerves. Whenever they met, that is; or when Henry saw him driving the newest, prettiest, best-dressed girl about in his cart. Two years earlier he would have had two ponies hitched tandem. But now, a little older, less willing to be conspicuous except in strict conformity with the conventions, he drove his carefully matched team side by side. His seat, his hold of the reins, the very turning-back of his tan gloves, all were correct. These, indeed, were details in the problem of living and moving about with success among one's fellows that Elberforce Jenkins regarded as really important. Like one's stance at golf, and cultivating the favour of men who could be influential in a business or social way.

Yes, Elbow was on Henry's nerves.

But Elbow had long since forgotten Henry, except for a chance nod now and then. And occasionally a moment's annoyance that Henry should insist on keeping alive a nickname that had with years and the beginnings of dignity become undesirable.

2

The blow fell on Henry at half-past five on the Tuesday. I mark the time thus precisely because it perhaps adds a touch of interest to the consideration of what happened between then and Friday night, when McGibbon first saw what he had done. Of the importance of the blow in Henry's life there is no doubt. It turned him sharply. Not until he was approaching middle life could he look back on the occasion without wincing. And while wincing, he would say that it was what he had needed. Plainly. That it made a man of him, or started the process.

As to that, I can't say. Perhaps it did. Life is not so simple as Henry had been taught it was. I am fatalist enough to believe that Henry would have become what he was to become in any event, because it was in him. I doubt if he could have been given any other direction. Though of course he might have gone under simply through a failure to get aroused. Something had to start him, of course.

The practical difficulty with Henry's life was, of course, that he was strong. He didn't know this himself. He thought he was weak. Some who observed him thought the same. There were reasons enough. But Mildred always declared flatly that he was a genius, that he was too good for Sunbury, against the smugness of which community she was inclined to rail. A debate on this point between Mrs Henderson and, say, William F. Donovan, the drug store man, would have been interesting. Mr Donovan's judgments of human character were those of Simpson Street.

I say Henry was strong, because I can't interpret his rugged nonconformity in any other way. A weaker lad would long since have given up, gone into Smith Brothers' wholesale, taken his spiritual beating and fallen into step with his generation. But Henry's resistance was so strong and so deep that he didn't even know he was resisting. He was doing the only thing he could do, being what he was, feeling what he felt. And when instinct failed to

guide, when 'the Power' lay quiescent, he was simply waiting and blundering along; but never falling into step. He had to wait until the Power should rise with him and take him out and up where he belonged.

There was a little scene the Monday evening before.

It was in the rooms. Mildred was there.

Henry stumbled in on the two of them, Mildred and Humphrey. They were at the piano, seated side by side. They had been studying *Tristan and Isolde* together for a week or so; Mildred playing out the motifs. She often played the love duet from the second act for him, too. Henry heard him, mornings, trying to hum it while he shaved.

They insisted that he take a chair. He, with a sense of intrusion, took the arm of one, and kept hat and stick (his thin bamboo) in his hands.

Mildred said reflectively :—

'Corinne writes that she'll be back for a week late in August.' Then, noting the touch of dismay on Henry's ingenuous countenance, she added, 'But you mustn't have her on your conscience, Henry.'

'It isn't that——'

'I'm fond of Corinne. But I can see now that you two would never get on long together. In a queer way you're too much alike. At least, you both have positive qualities. Corinne will some day find a nice little husband who'll look after the business side of her concerts. And you—well, Henry, you've got to have some one to mother you.' She smiled at him thoughtfully. 'Some one you can make a lot of.'

'No.' Henry's colour was up. He was shaking his head. 'You don't understand. I'm through with girls. They're nothing in my life. Nothing!'

She slowly shook her head. 'That's absurd, Henry. You're particularly the kind. You'll never be able to live without idealising some woman.'

'I tell you they're nothing to me. My life is different now. I've changed. I've put money—a lot of money—into the *Gleaner*. It means big responsibilities. You've no idea——'

'If I hadn't seen you writing,' she mused aloud. . . . 'No, Henry. You won't change. You'll grow, but you won't change. You're going to write, Henry. And you'll always write straight at a woman.'

'No! No!' Henry was sputtering. He appeared to be struggling. 'Life means work to me. I'm through with——'

She took down the *Tristan* score from the piano and turned the pages in her lap.

'Love is the great vitaliser, Henry,' she said.

'No—it's the mind. Thinking. We have to learn to think clearly—objectively.'

'Objectively? No. Not you. And I'm glad, in a way. Because I know we're going to be proud of you. But it's love that makes the world go round. They don't teach you that in the colleges, but it's the truth . . . Take Wagner—and *Tristan*. He wrote it straight at a woman. And it's the greatest opera ever written. And the greatest love story. It's that because he was terribly in love when he wrote it. Do you suppose, for one minute, that if Wagner had never seen Mathilde Wesendonck we should have had *Tristan*?'

She paused, pursed her lips, studied the book with eyes that seemed to grow misty, then looked up at Humphrey.

He—tall, angular, very sober—met her gaze; then his swarthy face wrinkled up about the eyes and he hurriedly drew his cob pipe from his pocket and began filling it.

Henry stared at the rug; traced out the pattern with his stick. He couldn't answer this last point, because he had never heard of Mathilde Wesendonck. And as he was supposed to be 'musical' it seemed best to keep quiet.

He made an excuse of some sort and went out for a walk. Down by the lake he thought of several strong arguments. Mildred was wrong. She had to be wrong. For he had cut girls out.

It was like Mildred to speak out in that curiously direct way. She was fond of Henry. And she had divined, out of her various, probably rather vivid contacts with life, certain half-truths that were not accepted in Sunbury. I think she saw Henry pretty clearly, saw that he was

driven by an emotional dynamo that was to bring him suffering and success both. . . . Mildred, of course, never really belonged in a small town.

It was at the close of the following afternoon that Henry came in and found Humphrey's long figure stretched out on the window-seat—he was smoking, of course—of all things, blowing endless rings up at the curtains Mildred had made and hung for him. His dark skin looked gray. There were deep lines in his face. He couldn't speak at first. But he stared at Henry.

That young man put away hat and stick, had his coat off, and was rolling back his shirt sleeves for a wash, humming the refrain of *Kentucky Babe*. Then, through a slow moment, the queer silence about him, Humphrey's attitude—that fact, for that matter, that Hump was here at all; he was a great hand to work until six or after at the *Voice* office—these things worked in on him like a premonition. The little song died out. He went on, a few steps, toward the bathroom, then came to a stop, turned toward the silent figure on the window-seat, came slowly over.

Now he saw his friend clearly. As he sank on the arm of a chair—it was where he had sat the evening before—he caught his breath.

'Wha—what is it?' he asked. His voice was suddenly husky. His mind went blank. There was sensation among the roots of his hair. 'What's the matter, Hump?'

Finally Humphrey took out his pipe and spoke. His voice, too, was low and uncertain. But he gathered control of it as he went on.

'Where've you been?' he asked.

'Me? Why, over at Rockwell Park. Bob McGibbon wanted me to see about a regular correspondent for the "Rockwell Park Doings."'

'Heard anything?'

'Me? No. Why? . . . Hump, what is it? What you getting at?'

'Then I've got to tell you.' He swung his feet around; sat up; emptied his pipe, then filled it.

'Is it—is it—about me, Hump?'

'Yes. It is.'

'Well—then—hadn't you better tell me?'

'I'm trying to, Hen. It's dam' unpleasant. You remember—you told me once—early in the summer—' Humphrey, usually most direct, was having difficulty in getting it out—'you told me you rode a tandem up to Hoffmann's Garden with that little Wilcox girl.'

'Oh, that! That was nothing. Why all the time I lived at Mrs Wilcox's I never——'

'Yes, I know. Let me try to tell this, Hen. It's hard enough. She's in a scrape. That girl. There's a big row on. I'm not going into the details, so far as I've heard 'em. They're ugly. They wouldn't help. But her mother's collapsed. Her uncle and aunt have turned up and taken the girl off somewhere. He's a butcher on the North Side.'

Henry was pale but attentive.

'In all the time I lived there,' he began again . . .

'Please, Hen! Wait! It is one of those mean scandals that tear up a town like this every now and then. Boils up through the crust and has to be noticed. It's a beastly thing. The number of men involved . . . some older ones . . . and young Bancroft. Widdicombe has left town. There's some queer talk about her marrying him. And they say one or two others have run away. Widdicombe got out before the storm broke. Jim Smith says he's been heard from at San Francisco.'

'But they can't say of me——'

'Hen, they can and they do.'

'But I can prove——'

'What can you prove? What chance will you have to prove anything? You were disturbed when Martha Caldwell and the party with Charles H. Merchant caught you with her up at Hoffmann's——'

'But, Hump, I didn't *want* to take her out that night! And it's the only time I ever really talked to her except once or twice in the boarding-house.'

He was speaking with less energy now. He felt the blow. Not as he would feel it a few hours later; but he felt it.

Humphrey watched him.

'It has brought things home to me,' he said uncertainly. 'The sort of thing that can happen. When you're caught in a drift, you don't think, of course . . . Now, Hen, listen! This is real trouble. It's going to hit you about to-morrow—full force. It's got to be faced. I don't want to think that you'd run——'

'Oh, no,' Henry put in mechanically, 'I won't run.'

'I'm sure you won't. But it's got to be faced. You're hit especially.'

'But why, when I——'

'Because you lived alone there, in the boarding-house, for two years. And you were caught with her at Hoffmann's, she in bloomers, drinking beer. Just a cheap little tough. And there isn't a thing you can do but live it down. Nobody will say a direct word to you.'

'That's what I'll do,' said Henry, 'live it down.'

'It'll be hard, Hen.'

Henry sighed. 'I've faced hard things, Hump.'

'Yes, you have, in a way.'

'I'll wash up. Where we going to eat? Stanley's?'

'I suppose. I don't feel like eating much.'

It was not until they had started out that Henry gave signs of a deeper reaction.

On the outer doorstep he stood motionless.

'Coming along?' asked Humphrey, trying to hide his anxiety.

'Why—yes. In a minute . . . Say, Hump, do you suppose they'll—you know, I ain't afraid'—an uprush of feeling coloured his voice, brought a shake to it—'I don't know. Perhaps I *am* afraid. All those people—you know, at Stanley's . . .'

Humphrey did an unusual thing; laid his hand on Henry's shoulder affectionately; then took his arm and led him along the alley, saying:—

'We'll go down to the lunch counter. It's just as well, Hen. Better get sure of yourself first.'

He wondered, as they walked rapidly on—Henry had a tendency to walk fast and faster when brooding or excited—whether the boy would ever get sure of himself. There were queer, bitter, profoundly confusing thoughts in

his own mind, and an emotional tension, but back of all this, coming through it and softening him, his feeling for Henry. It was something of an elder brother's feeling, I think. Henry seemed very young. It was wicked that he had to suffer with all those cynical older men. It might mark the boy for life. Such things happened.

He decided to watch him closely. Sooner or later the thing would hit him full. He would have to be protected then. Even from himself, perhaps. In a way it oughtn't to be worse for him than it had been after the Hoffmann's Garden incident.

But it was worse. The other had been, after all, no more than an incident. This, now, was an overpowering fact. The town didn't have to notice the other. And despite the gossiping instinct, your small community is rather glad to edge away from unpleasant surmises that are not established facts. Facts are so uncompromising. And so disrupting. And sometimes upsetting to standardised thought.

'That's it,' thought Humphrey—he was reduced to thought; Henry was striding on in white silence—'it's a fact. They can't evade it. Only thing they can do, if they're to keep comfortable about their dam' town, is to kill everybody connected with the mess. Have to revise party and dinner lists. And it'll raise Ned with the golf tournament. They'll resent all that. And they'll have to show outsiders that the thing is an amazing exception. Nothing else going on like it. They'll have to show that.'

3

The next morning Henry—stiff, distrait, his eyes wandering a little now and then and his sensitive mouth twitching nervously—breakfasted with Humphrey at Stanley's.

People—some people—spoke to him. But he winced at every greeting. Humphrey watched him narrowly. He was ablaze with self-consciousness. But he held his head up pretty well.

He was all shut up within himself. Since their talk of the evening he hadn't mentioned the subject. It was clear that he couldn't mention it. He spoke of curiously irrelevant things. The style of Robert Louis Stevenson, for one. During the walk from the rooms to Stanley's. And then he brought up Bob McGibbon's theory that even with a country weekly, if you made your paper interesting enough you would get readers and the readers would bring the advertising He asked if Humphrey thought it would work out. 'It's important to me, you know, Hump. I've got a cool thousand up on the *Gleaner*. It's like betting on Bob McGibbon's idea to win.' His voice trembled a little. There were volcanoes of feeling stirring within the boy. He would erupt, of course, sooner or later. Humphrey found the experience moving to the point of pain.

When he entered the *Gleaner* office, Bob McGibbon, looking up at him anxiously, said good-morning, then pursed his lips in thought.

He found occasion to say, later :—

'Henry, how are you taking this thing?'

Henry swallowed, glanced out of the window, then threw out one hand with an expressive gesture and raised his eyes.

'Oh,' he said, 'all right. I—it's not true, Bob. Not about me.'

'That's just what I tell 'em,' said McGibbon eagerly. 'What you going to do? Go right on?'

'Well—why, yes! I can't run away.'

'Of course not. These things are mean. In a small town. Hypocrisy all round. I was thinking it over this morning, and it occurred to me you might like to get off by yourself and do some real writing for the paper. That's what we need, you know. Sketches. Snappy poetry. Little pictures of life—like Geroge Ade's stuff in the *Record*. Or a bit of the 'Gene Field touch. Something they'd have to read. Make the *Gleaner* known. Put it on every centre table in Sunbury. That's what we really need from you, you know. Your own stuff, not ours. Take this reception to-night at the Jenkins'. Anybody can cover that. I'll go myself.'

Henry, pale, lips compressed, shook his head.

'No,' said he, after a pause, 'I'll cover it.'

McGibbon considered this, then moved irresolutely back to his desk. Here, for a time, he sat, with knit brows, and stabbed at flies with his pen.

It would be walking into the lion's den, that was all. He wished he could think of a way to hold the boy back. There were complications. The *Gleaner*, just lately, had been going pretty violently after what McGibbon called the 'Old Cinch.' Without quite enough evidence, they were now virtually accusing Waterhouse of embezzlement, and the others of connivance. Mr Weston was among the most respected in Sunbury, rich, solid, a supporter of all good things. Though Boice and Waterhouse were unknown to local society, the Westons were intimate with the Jenkinses and their crowd. They all regarded the *Gleaner* as a scurrilous, libellous sheet, and McGibbon himself as an intruder in the village life. And there was another trouble; very recent. He couldn't speak of it with the boy in this state of mind. Not at the moment. He couldn't see his way . . . And now, with the realest scandal Sunbury had known in a decade piled freshly on the paper's bad name. But he couldn't think of a way to keep him from going. The boy was, in a way, his partner. There were little delicacies between them.

Henry went.

4

The reception given by Mr and Mrs Jenkins to Senator and Madame William M. Watt, was the most important social event of the summer.

The Jenkins's home, a square mansion of yellow brick, blazed with light at every window. Japanese lanterns were festooned from tree to tree about the lawn. An awning had been erected all the way from the front steps to the horse block, and a man in livery stood out there assisting the ladies from their carriages. It was felt by some, it was even remarked in undertones, that the Jenkinses were spreading it on pretty thick, even

considering that it was the first really public appearance of the Watts in Sunbury.

The Senator was known principally as titular sponsor for the Watt Currency Act, of fifteen years back . . . In those days his fame had overspread the boundaries of his own eastern state clear to California and the Mexican border. Older readers will recall that the Watt Bill nearly split a nation in its day. After his defeat for re-election, in the earlier nineties, he had slipped quietly into the obscurity in which he remained until his rather surprising marriage with the very rich, extremely vigorous American woman from abroad who called herself the Comtesse de la Plaine. At the time of his disappearance from public life various reasons had been dwelt on. One was drink. His complexion—the part of it not covered by his white beard—might have been regarded as corroborative evidence. But it was generally understood that he was 'all right' now; a meek enough little man, well past seventy, with an air of life-weariness and a suppressed cough that was rather disagreeable in church. His slightly unkempt beard grew a little to one side, giving his face a twisted appearance. On his occasional appearances about the streets he was always chewing an unlighted cigar. To the growing generation he was a mildly historic myth, like Thomas Buchanan or James G. Blaine.

Mrs Watt—who during her brief residence in Sunbury (they had bought the Dexter Smith place, on Hazel Avenue, in May) had somehow attached firmly to her present name the foreign-sounding prefix, 'Madame'—was a head taller than her husband, with snappy black eyes, a strongly hooked nose and an indomitable mouth. She was not beautiful, but was of commanding presence. The fact that she had lived long in France naturally raised questions. But there appeared to be no questioning either her earlier title or her wealth. If she seemed to lack a few of the refinements of a lady—it was whispered among the younger people that she swore at her servants—still, a rich countess, married to the self-effacing but indubitable author of the Watt Act, was, in the nature of things, equipped to stir Sunbury to the depths.

But the member of this interesting family with whom we are now concerned was the Madame's niece, a girl of eighteen or nineteen who had been reared, it was said, in a convent in France, then educated at a school in the eastern states, and was now living with her aunt for the first time.

Her name fell oddly on ears accustomed to the Bessies, Marys, Fannies, Marthas, Louises, Alices, and Graces of Sunbury. It was Cicely—Cicely Hamlin. It was clearly an English name. It proved, at first, difficult to pronounce, and led to joking among the younger set. The girl herself was rather foreign in appearance. Distinctly French some said. She was slimly pretty, with darkish hair and a quick, brisk, almost eager way of speaking and smiling and bobbing her hair. She used her hands, too, more than was common in Sunbury, a point for the adherents of the French theory. The quality that perhaps most attracted young and old alike was her sensitive responsiveness. Sometimes it was nearly timidity. She would listen in her eager way; then talk, all vivacity—head and hands moving, on the brink of a smile every moment—then seem suddenly to recede a little, as if fearful that she had perhaps said too much, as if a delicate courtesy demanded that she be merely the attentive, kindly listener. She could play and be merry with the younger crowd. But she had read books that few of them had ever heard of. Plainly—though nothing so complex was plain to Henry at this period—she was a girl of delicate nervous organisation, strung a little tightly; a girl who could be stirred to almost naïve enthusiasms and who could perhaps be cruelly hurt.

Henry had seen her—once on the hotel veranda talking brightly with Mary Ames, who seemed almost stodgy beside her, once on the Chicago train, once or twice driving with Elberforce Jenkins in his high cart. The sight of her had stirred him. Already he had had to fight thoughts of her—tantalisingly indistinct mental visions—during the late night hours between staring wakefulness and sleep. And it was impossible wholly to escape bitterness over the thought that he hadn't met her. He oughtn't

to care. He couldn't admit to himself that it mattered. A couple of years back, in his big days, they would have met all right. First thing. Everybody would have seen to it. They would have told her about him. Now . . . oh well!

He stood in the shadow, out by the carriage entrance, pulling at his moustache. There had been a sort of rushing of the spirit, almost a fervour, in his first determination to face the town bravely. Now for the first time he began to see that the thing couldn't be rushed at. It might take years to build up a new good name—years of slights and sneers, of dull hours and slack nerves. For Henry did know that emotional climaxes pass.

He chose a time, between carriages, when the sheltered walk was empty, to move up toward the house. Everybody here was dressed up—'Wearing everything they've got!' he muttered. He himself had on his blue suit and straw hat and carried his bamboo stick. A thick wad of copy paper protruded from a side pocket. A vest pocket bulged with newly sharpened pencils. It had seemed best not to dress. He wasn't a guest; just the representative of a country weekly.

By the front steps there were arched openings in the canvas. Up there in the light were music and rustling, continuous movement and the unearthly cackling sound that you hear when you listen with a detached mind to many chattering voices in an enclosed space. Mrs Jenkins was up there, doubtless, at the head of a reception line. He knew now, with despair in his heart, that he couldn't mount those steps. Nearly everybody there would know him. He couldn't do it.

He looked around. At one side stood a jolly little group, under the Japanese lanterns. Young people. Two detached themselves and came toward the steps. A third joined them; a girl.

'Here,' said this girl—Mary Ames's voice—'you two wait here. I'll find her.'

Mary came right past him and ran up the steps. Henry drew back, very white, curiously breathless.

The other two stood close at hand. Henry wondered

if he could slip away. New carriages had arrived; new people were coming up the walk. He stepped off on the grass. He found difficulty in thinking.

The girl, just across the walk, was Cicely Hamlin. The fellow was Alfred Knight. He worked in the bank; a colourless youth. He plainly didn't know what to say to this very charming new girl. He stood there, shifting his feet.

Henry thought: 'Has he heard yet? Does he know? . . . Does *she* know?'

Then Alfred's wandering eye rested on him, hailed him with relief.

'Oh, hallo, Hen;' he said. Then, after a long silence, 'Like you to meet Miss Hamlin. Mr Henry Calverly.'

Al Knight never could remember whether you said the girl's name first or the man's.

But he hadn't heard yet. Evidently. Henry sighed. Since it had to come, it would be almost better . . .

Miss Cicely Hamlin moved a hesitant step forward; murmured his name.

He had to step forward too.

In sheer miserable embarrassment he raised his hand a little way.

In responsive confusion she raised hers.

But his had dropped.

Hers moved downward as his came up again.

She smiled at this and extended her hand again frankly.

He took it. He didn't know that he was gripping it in a strong nervous clasp.

'I've heard of you,' she said. He liked her voice. 'You write, don't you?'

'Oh yes,' said he huskily, 'I write some.'

She didn't know.

He wondered dully who could have told her of him. It sounded like the old days. It was almost, for a moment, encouraging.

Al Knight drifted away to speak to one of the new-comers.

'Do you write stories?' she asked politely.

'I try to, sometimes. It's awfully hard.'

'Oh yes, I know.'

'Do *you* write?'

'Why—oh no! But I've wished I could. I've tried a little.'

So far as words went they might as well have been mentioning the weather. It was not an occasion in which words had any real part. He saw, felt, the presence of a girl unlike any he had known—slimly pretty, alive with a quick eager interest, and subtly friendly. She saw, and felt, a white tragic face out of which peered eyes with a gloomy fire in them.

Before Alfred Knight drifted back she asked him to call. Then, at the sight of them, Alfred drifted away again.

'Perhaps,' she added shyly, 'you'd bring some of your stories.'

'I haven't anything I could bring,' he replied, still with that burning look. 'Nothing that's any good. If I had . . .' Then this blazed from him in a low shaky voice: 'You haven't heard what they're saying about me. I can see that. If you had you wouldn't ask me to call.'

'Oh, I'm sure I would,' she murmured, greatly confused.

'You wouldn't. You really couldn't. But I want to say this—quick, before they come!'—for he saw Mary Ames in the doorway—'I've *got* to say it! They'll tell you something about me. Something dreadful. It isn't true. It—is—not true!'

'She isn't in there,' said Mary, joining them. Then 'Oh!' She looked at Henry with a hint of alarm in her face; said, 'How do you do!' in a voice that chilled him, brought the despair back; then said to Cicely, ignoring him: 'We'd better tell them.' And moved a step toward the group under the lanterns.

Cicely hesitated.

It was happening, right there; and in the cruellest manner. Henry couldn't speak. He felt as if a fire were burning in his brain.

Al Knight, seeing Mary, drifted back.

The group, over yonder, was breaking up. Or coming this way.

Another moment and Elberforce Jenkins—tall, really

good-looking in his perfect-fitting evening clothes—stood before them.

He glanced at Henry. Gave him the cut direct.

'All right,' said Elbow Jenkins, addressing Cicely now, 'we'll go without her. She won't mind.'

Still Cicely hesitated. For a moment, standing there, lips parted a little, looking from one to another. Then, with an air of shyness, apparently still confused, she gave Henry her hand.

'Do come,' she said, with a quick little smile. 'And bring the stories. I'm sure I'd like them.'

She went with them, then.

Henry stared after her with wet eyes. Then for a while he wandered alone among the trees. His thoughts, like his pulse, were racing uncontrollably.

It is to be noted that he returned a while later, faced Mrs Jenkins, wrote down the names of all the guests he recognised, and walked, very fast, with a stiff dignity, lips compressed, eyes and brain still burning, down to the *Gleaner* office.

5

The story had to be written. Not at the rooms, though; Mildred might be there with Humphrey. Sometimes he worked at the Y.M.C.A.

But there was a light in the windows of the *Gleaner* office, over Hemple's.

McGibbon was up there, bent over his desk in his shirt-sleeves, a hand sprawling through his straight ragged hair.

Henry acknowledged his partner's greeting with a grunt; dropped down at his own desk; plunged at the story.

McGibbon looked up once or twice, saw that Henry was unaware of him; continued his own work. His thin face looked worn. He bit his lip a good deal.

'There,' said Henry, finally, with a grim look—'there's the reception story.'

'Oh, all right.' McGibbon came over; took the pencilled

script; then sat on the edge of the table beside Henry's desk.

'Haven't got some good filler stuff?' he queried wearily, brushing a hand across his forehead. 'We're going to have a lot of extra space this week.'

He watched Henry, to see if this remark had an effect. It had none. He rubbed his hand slowly back and forth across his forehead.

'The fact is,' he remarked, 'they've landed on us. Pretty hard. The advertisers. Just about all Simpson Street. It's a sort of boycott, apparently. Takes out two-thirds of our advertising. And Weston called my note—that two hundred and forty-eight—for paper. Simply charged it up against our account. Pretty dam' high-handed, I call it!'

His voice was rising. He sprang up, paced the floor.

'They're showing fight,' he ran on. 'We've got to lick 'em. That's my way—start at the drop of the hat. What's a little advertising! Get readers—that's the real trick of it. We'll lick 'em with circulation, that's what we'll do!'

He stood over Henry's desk; even pounded it. The boy didn't seem to get it, even now. He was hardly listening. With his own money at stake. But McGibbon was finding him like that; queer gaps on the practical side. No money sense whatever!

'Henry,' he was crying now, 'it's up to you. You're a genius. It's sheer waste to use you on fool receptions. *Write*, man! *WRITE!* Let yourself go. Anything—sketches, verse, stories! Let's give 'em what they don't look for in a country paper. Like the old Burlington *Hawkeye* and that fellow Brann. And the paper in Lahore that nobody would ever have heard of if Kipling hadn't written prose and verse to fill in, here and there. He was a kid, too. There's always, somewhere, a little paper that's famous because a man can *write*. Why shouldn't it be us! Us! Right up here over the meat-market. Why, we can make the little old *Gleaner* known from coast to coast. We can put Sunbury on the map. Just with your pen, my boy! With your pen! And then where'll old Weston be! Where'll these little two-bit advertisers be!'

He spread his thin hands in a gesture of triumph.

Henry looked up now; slowly pushed back his chair; said, in a weak voice, 'I'm tired. Guess I'd better get along;' and walked out.

McGibbon stared after him, his mouth literally open.

6

Back of the old Parmenter place the barn was dark. Henry felt relief. He was tingling with excitement. He couldn't move slowly. His fists were clenched. Every nerve in his body was strung tight.

He was thinking hopelessly, 'I must relax.'

He crept through the dim shop, among Humphrey's lathes, belts, benches of tools, big kites and rows of steel wheels mounted in frames. There were large planes, too, parts of the gliders Humphrey had been puttering with for a long time. Three years, he had once said.

Henry lingered on the stairs and looked about the ghostly rooms. Beams of moonlight came in through the windows and touched this and that machine. He felt himself attuned to all the trouble, the disaster, in the universe. Life was a tragic disappointment. Nothing ever came right. People didn't succeed; they struggled and struggled to breast a mighty, tireless current that swept them ever backward.

Poor old Hump! He had put money into this shop. All the little he had; or nearly all. And into the technical library that lined his bedroom walls upstairs. His daily work at the *Voice* office was just a grind, to keep body and soul together while the experiments were working out. Hump was patient.

'Until I moved in here,' Henry thought, with a disturbingly passive sort of bitterness, 'and brought girls and things. He doesn't have his nights and Sundays for work any more. Hump could do big things, too.'

He went on up the stairs and switched on the lights in the living-room.

He caught sight of his face in a mirror. It was white.

There was a look of strain about the eyes. The little moustache, turned up at the ends, mocked him.

'I'll shave it off,' he said aloud.

He even got out his razor and began nervously stropping it.

He was alarmed to discover that his control of his hands was none too good. They moved more quickly than he meant them to, and in jerks.

Too, the notion of shaving his moustache struck him as weakness, an impulse to be resisted. Too much like retreating. Subtly like that.

He put the razor back in its drawer.

In the centre of the living-room rug, standing there, stiffly, he said :—

'I'll face them. I'll go down fighting. They shan't say I surrendered.'

He walked round and round the room.

He had never in his life felt anything like this jerky nervousness. A restlessness that wouldn't permit him so much as to sit down.

While in the *Gleaner* office he had hardly been aware of McGibbon. He certainly hadn't listened to him.

But now, like a blow, everything McGibbon had said came to him. Every syllable. Suddenly he could see the man, towering ever him, pounding his desk. Talking—talking—full of fresh hopes while the world crumbled around him. More disaster ! It was the buzzing song of the old globe as it spun endlessly on its axis. Disaster ! . . . The advertisers had at last combined against the paper. Old Weston had called McGibbon's note. That must have taken about the last of Henry's thousand. They were broke.

His hand brushed his coat pocket. It bulged with copy paper. He must have thrust it back there absently, at the office.

He drew it out and gazed at it.

It was curious; he seemed to see it as a printed page, with a title at the top, and his name. He couldn't see what the title was. Yet it was there, and it was good.

His restlessness grew. Again he walked round and

round the room. There was a glow in his breast. Something that burned and fired his nerves and drove him as one is driven in a dream. Either he must rush outdoors and wander at a feverish pace around the town and up the lake shore—walk all night—or he must sit down and write.

He sat down. Picked up an atlas of Humphrey's and wrote on his lap. And he wrote, from the beginning, as he would have walked had he gone out, in a fever of energy, gripping the pencil tightly, holding his knees up a little, heels off the floor. The colour reappeared about his forehead and temples, then on his cheeks.

When Humphrey came in, after midnight, he was in just this posture, writing at a desperate rate. The floor all about him was strewn with sheets of paper. One or two had drifted off to the centre of the room. He didn't hear his friend come up the stairs. When he saw him, standing, looking down, something puzzled, he cried out excitedly:—

'Don't Hump!'

Humphrey resisted the impulse to reply with a 'Don't what?'

'Go on! Don't disturb me!'

'You seem to be hitting it up.'

'I am. I can't talk! Please—go away! Go to bed. You'll make me lose it!'

Humphrey obeyed.

Later—well along in the night—he awoke.

There was a crack of light about his door. He turned on his own light. It was quarter to three.

'Here!' he called. 'What on earth are you up to, Hen?'

A chair scraped. Then Henry came to the door and burst it open. His coat was off now, and his vest open. He had unbuttoned his collar in front so that the two ends and the ends of his tie hung down. His hair was straggling down over his forehead.

'Do you know what time it is, Hen?'

'No. Say—listen to this! Just a few sentences. You liked the piece I did about the Business Men's Picnic, remember. Well, this has sorta grown out of it. It's just

the plain folks along Simpson Street. Say! There's a title for the book.'

'For the what!'

'The book. Oh, there'll be a lot of them. Sorta sketches. Or maybe they're stories. I can't tell yet. Plain folks of Simpson Street. Yes, that's good. Wait a second, while I write it down. The thing struck me all at once—to-night! —Queer, isn't it!—thinking about the folks along the street—Bill Hemple, and Jim Smith in your press room with the tattooed arms, and old Boice and Charlie Waterhouse, and the way Bob McGibbon blew into town with a big dream, and the barber shop—Schultz and Schwartz's —and Donovan's soda fountain, and Izzy Bloom and the trouble about his boys in the high school, and all his fires, and Mr Draine, the Y.M.C.A. secretary that's been in the British Mounted Police in Mashonaland—think of it! In Africa—and——'

'Would you mind'—Humphrey was on an elbow, blinking sleepy eyes—'would you mind talking a little more slowly. Good lord! I can't——'

'All right, Hump. Only I'm excited, sorta. You see, it just struck me that there's as much romance right here on Simpson Street as there is in Kipling's Hills or Bagdad or Paris. Just the way people's lives go. And what old Berger's really thinking about when he tells you the vegetables were picked yesterday.'

Humphrey gazed—wider awake now—at the wild figure before him. And a thrill stirred his heart. This boy was supposed to be crushed.

'How much have you done?' he asked soberly.

'Most finished this first one. It's about old Boice and Charlie Waterhouse and Mr Weston——'

'Gee!' said Humphrey.

'I call it, *The Caliph of Simpson Street*.'

'Well—see here, you're going to bed, aren't you?'

'Oh, yes. But listen.' And he began reading aloud.

Humphrey waved his arms.

'No, no! For heaven's sake, go to bed, Hen!'

'Well, but—oh, say! Just thought of something!' And he went out, chuckling.

Humphrey awoke again at eight. Through his open door came a light that was not altogether of the sun.

The incident of the earlier morning came to him in confused form, like a dream.

He sprang out of bed.

There, still bending over the atlas, was Henry. The sheets of paper lay like drifts of snow about him now. His pencil was flying.

He looked up. His face was white and red in spots now. He was grinning, apparently out of sheer happiness.

'Say,' he cried, 'listen to this! It's one I call, *The Cauliflowers of the Caliph.* Oh, by the way, I've changed the title of the book to *Satraps of the Simple.*

'The whole book'll be sort of imaginary, like that. It's queer. Just as if it came to me out of the air. Things I never thought of in my life. Only everything I ever knew's going into it. Things I'd forgotten.'

'Hen,' said Humphrey, 'are you stark mad?'

'Me? Why—why no, Hump!' The grin was a thought sheepish now. 'But—well, Bob McGibbon said we needed stuff for the paper.'

'How many stories have you written already?'

'Just three.'

'*Three!* In one night!'

'But they're short, Hump. I don't believe they average over two or three thousand words. I think they're good. You know, just the way they made me feel. Funny idea—Bagdad and Simpson Street, all mixed up together.'

'One thing's certain, Hen. You're an extremely surprising youth, but right here's where you quit. I don't propose to have a roaring maniac here in the rooms. On my hands.'

'Oh, Hump, I can't quit now! You don't understand. It's wonderful. It just comes. Like taking dictation.'

'Dictation is what you're going to take. Right now. From me. Brush up your clothes, and pick up all that mess while I dress. We'll go out for some breakfast.'

'Not now, Hump! Wait—I promise I'll go out a little later.'

'You'll go now. Get up.'

Henry obeyed. But he nearly fell back again.

'Gosh!' he murmured.

'Stiff, eh?'

'I should smile. And sorta weak.'

'No wonder. Come on, now! And I want your promise that after breakfast you'll go straight to bed.'

'Hump, I can't.'

This, apparently, was the truth. He couldn't.

He stopped in at Jackson's Book Store (formerly B. F. Jones's) and bought paper and pencils: Then, in a thrill of fresh importance, he bought penholders, large desk blotters, a flannel pen-wiper with a bronze dog seated in the centre, a cut-glass inkstand, a ruler, half a dozen pads of a better paper, a partly abridged dictionary, Roget's *Thesaurus* (for years he had casually wondered what a Thesaurus was), a round glass paperweight with a gay butterfly imprisoned within, four boxes of wire clips, assorted sizes, and, because he saw it, Crabb's *Synonyms*. Then he saw an old copy of *The Thousand and One Nights* and bought that.

It seemed to him that he ought to be equipped for his work. Before he went out he asked the prices of the better makes of typewriters.

And for the first time in two years, he uttered the magic but too often fatal words :—

'Just charge it, if you don't mind.'

7

He was back at the rooms by nine-fifteen. Before the university clock boomed out the hour of noon, he had written that elusive, extraordinary little classic, *A Kerbstone Barmecide*, and had jotted down suggestive notes for the story that was later to be known as *The Printer and the Pearls*.

By this time all thoughts of civic reform had faded out. Charlie Waterhouse, now that *The Caliph of Simpson Street* was done and, in a surface sense, forgotten, no longer appeared to him as a crook who should be ousted from the local political triumvirate and from town office; he was

but a bit of ore in the rich lode of human material with which Henry's fancy was playing. The important fact about the new Waterhouse store-and-office building in South Sunbury, was not that there was reason to believe Charlie had built it with town money but that he had put a medallion bas-relief of himself in terra cotta in the front wall.

Charlie figured, though, unquestionably, in *Sinbad the Treasurer*.

At noon, deciding that he would stroll out after a little and eat a bite, Henry stretched out on the lounge. Here he dozed, very lightly for an hour or two.

Humphrey stole in, found him tossing there, fully dressed, mumbling in his sleep, and stole out.

But early in the afternoon Henry leaped up. His brain, or his emotions, or whatever the source of his ideas, was a glowing, boiling, seething crater of tantalising, obscurely associated concepts and scraps of characterisation and queerly vivid, half-glimpsed dramatic moments, situations, contrasts. They amounted to a force that dragged him on. The thought that some bit might escape before he could catch it and get it written down kept his pulse racing.

At about half-past four he finished that curious fantasy, *Roc's Eggs, Strictly Fresh.*

This accomplishment brought a respite. He could see his book clearly now. The cover, the title page and particularly the final sentence. He knew that the concluding story was to be called *The Old Man of the Street.* He printed out this title; printed, too, several titles of others yet to be written—*Ali Anderson and the Four Policemen* and *Scheherazade in a Livery Stable,* and one or two more.

His next performance I find particularly interesting in retrospect. During the long two years of his extreme self-suppression in the vital matters of candy, girls, and charge-accounts, Henry had firmly refused to sing. Without a murmur he had foregone the four or five dollars a Sunday he could easily have picked up in church quartet work, the occasional sums from substituting in this or that male quartet and singing at funerals. It was even more extraordinary that he should have given up, as he did, his old

habit of singing to girls. The only explanation he had ever offered of this curious stand was the rather obscure one he gave Humphrey that singing was 'too physical.' Whatever the real complex of motives, it had been a rather violent, or at least a complete reaction.

But now he strode about the room, chin up, chest expanded, brows puckered, roaring out scales and other vocalisings in his best voice. The results naturally were somewhat disappointing, after the long silence, but he kept at it.

He was still roaring, half an hour later, when McGibbon came anxiously in.

'Saw Humphrey Weaver down-town,' said the editor of the *Gleaner*, 'and he said I'd better look you up.'

An hour later McGibbon—red spots in his cheeks, a nervous glitter in his eyes—hurried down to the *Gleaner* office with the pencilled manuscripts of four of the 'Caliph' stories. He was hurrying because it seemed to him highly important to get them into type. For one thing, something might happen to them—fire, anything. For another, it might occur to Henry to sell them to an eastern magazine.

When Humphrey came in, just before six, Henry was already well into *Scheherazade in a Livery Stable*, and was chuckling out loud as he wrote.

Friday night was press night at the *Gleaner* office. Henry strolled in about ten o'clock and carelessly dropped a thick roll of script on McGibbon's desk.

That jaded editor leaned back, ran thin fingers through his tousled hair, and wearily looked over the dishevelled, yawning, exhausted, grinning youth before him. Never in his life had he seen an expression of such utter happiness on a human face.

'How many stories is this?' he asked.

'Ten.'

'Good Lord! That's a whole book!'

'No—hardly. I've thought of some more. There'll be fifteen or twenty altogether. I just thought of one, coming over here. Think I'll call it. *The Story of the Man from Jerusalem.* It's about the life of a little Jew store-keeper in a town like this. Struck me all of a sudden—

you know, how he must feel. I don't think I'll write it to-night—just make a few notes so it won't get away from me.'

Bob McGibbon rose up, put on coat and hat, took Henry firmly by the arm, and marched him, protesting, home.

'Now,' he said, 'you go to bed.'

'Sure, Bob! What's the matter with you! I'm just going to jot down a few notes——'

'You're going to bed!' said McGibbon.

And he stood there, earnest, even grim, until Henry was undressed and stretched out peacefully asleep.

Henry slept until nearly three o'clock Saturday afternoon.

8

Senator Watt laid down the *Gleaner*, took off his glasses, removed an unlighted cigar from his mouth, and said, in his low, slightly husky voice:—

'A really remarkable piece of work. Quite worthy of Kipling.' The nineties, as we have already remarked, belong to Kipling. Outright. He had to be mentioned. 'It is fresh, vivid, and remarkably condensed. The author produces his effects with a sure swift stroke of the brush.

The Senator rarely spoke. When he did it was always in these measured, solid sentences, as if his words might be heard round the world and therefore must be chosen with infinite care. After delivering himself of this opinion he resumed his 'dry smoke' and reached for the *Evening Post*, which lay folded back to the financial page.

'I was sure you would think so,' said Cicely Hamlin, glancing first at the Senator then at her aunt. 'I wish you would read it, Aunt Eleanor.'

'Hm!' remarked that formidable person, planting her own gold-rimmed glasses firmly astride her rugged nose just above the point where it bent sharply downward, picking up the paper, then lowering it to gaze with a hint of habitual, impersonal severity at her niece.

'Even so,' she said. 'Suppose the young man has gifts.

That will hardly make it necessary for you to cultivate him. I gather he's a bad lot.'

'I have no intention of cultivating him,' replied Cicely, moving toward the door, but pausing by the mantel to pat her dark ample hair into place. She wore it low on her shapely neck. Cicely was wearing a simple-appearing, far from inexpensive blue frock.

Madame Watt read the opening sentence of *The Caliph of Simpson Street*, then lowered the paper again.

'Are you going out, Cicely?'

'No, I expect company here.'

'Who is coming?'

The girl compressed her lips for an instant, then :—

'Elberforce Jenkins.'

'Hm !' said Madame, and raised the paper.

An electric bell rang.

Cicely came back into the room; stood by a large bowl of roses; considered them.

The butler passed through the wide hall. A voice sounded in the distance. The butler appeared.

'Mr Henry Calverly calling,' he said.

Madame Watt raised her head so abruptly that her glasses fell, brought up with a jerk at the end of a thin gold chain, and swung there.

Cicely stood motionless by the roses.

The Senator glanced up, then shifted his cigar and resumed his study of the financial page.

'You will hardly——' began Madame.

'Show him into the drawing-room,' said Cicely with dignity.

The butler wavered.

Then, as if to settle all such small difficulties, Henry himself appeared behind him, smiling naïvely, eagerly.

Cicely hurried forward. Her quick smile came, and the little bob of her head.

'How do you do?' she said brightly. 'Mr Calverly—my aunt, Madame Watt ! And my uncle, Senator Watt !'

Madame Watt arose, deliberately, not without a solid sort of majesty. She was a presence; no other such ever appeared in Sunbury. She fixed an uncompromising gaze on Henry.

So uncompromising was it that Cicely covered her embarrassment by moving hurriedly toward the drawing-room, with a quick :—

'Come right in here.'

There was no one living on this erratic earth who could have cowed Henry on this Saturday evening. A week later, yes. But not to-night. He never even suspected that Madame meant to cow him. In such moments as these (and there were a good many of them in his life) Henry was incapable of perceiving hostility toward himself. The disaster that on Tuesday had seemed the end of the world was to-night a hazy memory of another epoch. There were few grown or half-grown persons in Sunbury that were not thinking on this evening of the meanest scandal in the known history of the town and, incidentally, among others involved, of Henry Calverly; but Henry himself was of those few.

He marched straight on Madame with cordial smile and outstretched hand. He wrung the hand of the impassive Senator.

That worthy said, now :—

'I have just read this first of your new series of sketches. Allow me to tell you that I think it admirable. In the briefest possible compass you have pictured a whole community in its petty relationships, at once tragic and comic. There is caustic satire in this sketch, yet I find deep human sympathy as well. It is a pleasure to make your acquaintance.'

When, after a rather amazing outpouring of words—the thing didn't amount to much; just a rough draft really; he hoped they'd like the next one; it was about cauliflowers—he had disappeared into the front room, the Senator remarked :—

'The young man makes an excellent impression.'

'The young man,' remarked Madame, 'is all right.'

Half an hour later the noise of the front door opening, and a voice, caused the two young people to start up out of a breathless absorption in the story called *A Kerbstone Barmecide*, which Henry was reading from long strips of

galley proof. He had already finished *The Cauliflowers of the Caliph.*

For a moment Cicely's face went blank.

The butler announced :—

'Mr Jenkins calling, Miss Cicely.'

The one who was not equal to the situation was Elbow. He stood in the doorway, staring.

Cicely was only a moment late with her smile.

Henry, with an open sigh of regret, nodded at his old acquaintance and folded up the long strips of galley proof.

Elbow came into the room now, and took Cicely's hand. But his small talk had gone with his wits. He barely returned Henry's nod.. Cicely, nervously active, suggested a chair, asked if there was going to be a Country Club dance this week, thanked him for the beautiful roses.

Then silence fell upon them; an awkward silence, that seemed to announce when it set in its intention of making itself increasingly awkward and very, very long. It was confirmed as a hopeless silence by the sudden little catchings of breath, the slight leaning forward, followed by nothing at all—first on the part of Cicely, then of Elbow.

Henry sat still.

Once he raised his eyes. They met squarely the eyes of Elbow. For a long moment each held the gaze. It was war.

Cicely said now, greatly confused :—

'I know that you sing, Mr Calverly. Please do sing something.'

There, now, was an idea ! It appealed warmly to Henry. He went straight to the piano, twisted up the stool, struck his three chords in turn, and plunged into that old song of Samuel's Lover's that has quaint charm when delivered with spirit and humour, *Kitty of Coleraine.*

After which he sang, *Rory O'More.* He had spirit and humour aplenty to-night.

The Senator came quietly in, bowed to Elbow, and asked for *The Low-Back Car.*

Elbow left.

'Why did you tell me you hadn't any stories you could

bring?' Cicely asked, a touch of indignation in her voice.

'It was so. I didn't.'

'You had these.'

'No. I didn't. That's just it!'

'But you don't mean——'

'Yes! Just since I met you!'

'Ten stories, you said. It seems—I can't——'

'But it's true. Three days. And nights, of course. I've been so excited!'

'I never heard of such a thing! Though, of course, Stevenson wrote *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* in three days. But ten different stories.' . . . She sat quiet, her hands folded in her lap, very thoughtful, flatteringly thoughtful. 'It sounds a little like magic.'

She was delicately pretty, sitting so still in her big chair.

'I wrote them straight at you,' he said, low, earnest. 'Every word.'

Even Henry caught the extreme emphasis of this, and hurried to elaborate.

'You see I was just sick Tuesday night. Everything had gone wrong with me. And then that horrible story that wasn't true. I knew I shouldn't have spoken of it to you, but—well, it was just driving me crazy, and I couldn't bear to think you might despise me like the others without ever knowing the truth. And . . . You see I must have felt the inspiration you . . . Even then, I mean . . .'

He was red. He seemed to be getting himself out of breath. And he was tugging at the roll of proofs in his pocket.

'Shall I—finish—this?'

'Oh, *yes!*' She sank into a great leather chair; looked up at him with glowing eyes. 'I want you to read me all of them. Please!'

She said it almost shyly.

Henry drew up a chair, found his place, and read on. And on. And on.

It was victory.

VII

THE BUBBLE, REPUTATION

I

THERE is nothing more unsettling than a sudden uncalculated, incalculable success. It at once thrills, depresses, confuses. People attack with the most unexpected venom. Others, the most unexpected others, defend with vehemence, One feels queerly out of it, yet forlornly conspicuous. As if it were some one else, or a dream. Innocent effort dragged to the public arena, quarrelled over, misunderstood. One boasts and apologises in a breath; dreads the thing will keep up and fears it will stop; finds one day it has stopped and ever after thinks back in sentimental retrospect to the good old days, the great days, when one did stir them up a bit.

Henry awoke on this Saturday morning to a sense of trouble that hung heavily over him during the walk with Humphrey from the rooms to Stanley's. Nothing of the stir reached them here. They were so late that the restaurant was about empty. Humphrey did hear a faint, distant voice booming, but gave no particular thought to it at the moment. And the Stanleys went quietly about their business as usual. Henry, indeed, was deep in his personal concern.

This found words over the oatmeal. He drew a rumpled paper from his pocket and submitted it to his room mate.

'Got this last night,' Henry explained moodily.

Humphrey read the following pencilled communication :—

'Henry Calverly, can't you see that your attentions are making it hard for a certain young lady? Do you want

to injure her reputation along with yours? Why don't you do the decent thing and leave town!

'A ROUND ROBIN OF PEOPLE WHO KNOW YOU.'

Humphrey pursed his lips over it.

'It's the Mamie Wilcox trouble, of course,' he said finally.

Henry nodded. His mouth drooped at the corners. There was a shine in his eyes.

Humphrey folded the paper; handed it back.

'Do you know who did it?'

Henry shook his head. 'They printed it out. Oh, I can make guesses, of course. It's about Cicely Hamlin and me.'

'You can't do anything.'

'I know.'

'And maybe you're going to be so successful that it won't matter. Laugh at 'em.'

'I don't believe that, Hump. I can't even imagine it.'

'At that, it may be jealousy.'

'I've thought of that. Even if it is . . . they're partly right. I didn't do what they think, but . . . Don't you see, Hump?'

'Oh, yes, I see clearly enough.'

'I've felt it. When I was all stirred up over my work, I went there to call. Last Saturday night. Then I got to thinking.' His voice was unsteady, but he kept on. Rather doggedly. 'I've stayed away all this week. Just worked. You know. You've seen how I've kept at it. Until Thursday night. I sorta slipped up then and went around there. She was out. And that's all. I've thought I—I've felt . . . Hump, do you believe in love—you know—at first sight?'

Humphrey's long face wrinkled into a rather wry smile, then sobered.

'I ought to,' he replied. 'In a way it was like that—with me.'

2

The first of Henry's meaty, fantastic little stories of the plain folk of the village, that one called *The Caliph of Simpson Street*, had appeared in the *Gleaner* of the preceding Saturday. It had made a distinct stir.

The second story was out on this the Saturday of our present narrative. In the order of writing, and in Henry's plans, it should have been *The Cauliflowers of the Caliph*. But Bob McGibbon, hanging wearily over the form in the press room late Friday night, suddenly hit on the notion of putting *Sinbad the Treasurer* in its place. He had all but the last one or two in type by that time. There were no mechanical difficulties; and he didn't consult the author. He could hit Charlie Waterhouse harder this way. *The Cauliflowers* was quietly humorous; while *Sinbad the Treasurer* had a punch. That was how McGibbon put it to the foreman, Jimmy Albers. The word 'punch' was fresh slang then. McGibbon himself introduced it into Sunbury.

Henry had Charlie and the town money in the back of his head, of course, when he wrote *Sinbad*. Probably more than he himself knew. McGibbon sniffed a sensation in the brief, vivid narrative. And a sensation of some sort he had to have. It was now or never with McGibbon. . . . He was able even to chuckle at the way Charlie would froth. He couldn't admit that the coat fitted, of course. He would just have to froth. It was Henry's *naïveté* that made the thing so perfect. An older man wouldn't have dared. Henry had just naturally rushed in. Yes, it was perfect.

Bob McGibbon was a hustler. And his nervous quickness of perception had brought him a few small successes and was to bring him larger ones. His Sunbury disaster was perhaps later to be charged to education.

The roots of that particular failure went deep. From first to last his attitude was that of a New Yorker in a small town. He outraged every local prejudice; he alienated, one by one, each friendly influence. He couldn't

understand that any such village as Sunbury resents the outsider who insists on pointing out its little human failings. It was recognised here and there as possible that old man Boice and Mr Weston of the bank might be covering up something in the matter of the genial town treasurer; but there was reason enough to believe that Mr Boice and Mr Weston knew pretty well what they were about. That, at least, was the rather equivocal position into which McGibbon by his very energy and assertiveness, drove many a ruffled citizen.

And it had needed very little urging on the part of the three leading citizens (McGibbon had a trick of referring to them in his paper as 'the Old Cinch') to bring about the boycott on the part of the Simpson Street and South Sunbury advertisers. As Charlie Waterhouse himself put it :—

'It ain't what he says about me. I can stand it. Man to man I can attend to him. The thing is, he's hurtin' the town. That's it—he's hurtin' the town.'

3

I have spoken of McGibbon's perception. He knew before reading three paragraphs that Henry had a touch of genius. Before finishing *A Kerbstone Barmecide* he knew—knew with a mental grasp that was pitifully wasted on the petty business of a country weekly—that nothing comparable had appeared anywhere in the English-speaking world since *Plain Tales from the Hills* and *Soldiers Three.* He knew, further, what no Sunbury seems ever able to recognise, that it is your occasional Henry who, as he mentally put it, 'rings the bell.' A queer young man, slightly dudish in dress, unable to fit in any conventional job, unable really to fall into step with his generation, blunderingly but incorrigibly a non-conformist, a moodily earnest yet absurdly susceptible young man, slightly self-conscious, known here and there among those of his age as 'sarcastic,' brilliant occasionally, dogged some of the time, dreamy and irresponsible the rest, yet with

charm. A youth who not infrequently was guilty of queer, rather unsocial acts; not of meanness or unkindness, rather of an inability to feel with and for others, to fit. A youth destined to work out his salvation, if at all, alone.

Yes, McGibbon read the signs shrewdly. For which Sunbury owes that erratic editor a small debt that remains unpaid and unrecorded to-day. No doubt that McGibbon brought him out. Encouraged him, spurred him, held him to it.

It was tradition in Sunbury that the two weekly papers should come decorously into the world each Saturday morning for the first delivery of mail. A small pile of each, toward noon, was put on sale in Jackson's book store (formerly B. F. Jones's). That was all.

And that was why McGibbon was able, on this Saturday of our story, to shake the town.

Poor old Sunbury was shaken heavily and often that summer. First by the Mamie Wilcox scandal. The sort of thing that didn't, couldn't happen. Men leaving town, and all that. A miserable, hastily contrived marriage. Henry's name dragged in, unjustly (as it happened), but convincingly. Though Henry always worked best after some sort of a blow. He had to be shaken out of himself. I think. It isn't likely that he could or would have written *Satraps of the Simple* if this particular blow hadn't fallen. It was a feverish job. He was stung, quivering, helpless. And then his great gift functioned.

Then Madame Watt happened to Sunbury. And shook the village to its roots.

And then came Bob McGibbon's last and mightiest effort.

When all commuting Sunbury converged on the old red brick 'depot' that morning for the seven-eleven and the seven forty-six and the eight-three and the eight-twenty-nine, hoarsely bellowing newsboys held the two ends of the platform. They wore cotton caps with 'The Weekly Gleaner' printed around the front. They were big, deep-throated roughs, the sort that shout 'extras' through the cities. They crowded the local newsdealer, little Mr Beamer, back into one of the waiting-rooms.

They fairly intimidated the town. People bought the *Gleaner* in self-defence, even boarded trains and rode off to Chicago without their regular *Tribune* or *Record* or *Inter Ocean*.

Other newsmen roamed the shady, pleasant residence streets, bellowing. Housewives, old gentlemen, servants, hurried out to buy.

There were posters on the fences, and along the billboards from Rockwell Park on the south to Borea on the north. McGibbon actually rented the space from the Northern Billboard Company. And there were newsmen with caps, in the afternoon, attacking the North Shore home-comers in the Chicago station, the very heart of things. All this—posters screaming like the news-men; big wood type, red and black—to advertise *Sinbad the Treasurer* and the rest of the long series and Henry Calverly.

'Attack' is the word. McGibbon was assaulting the town and the region as it had hardly been assaulted before. If it was his last, it was surely his most outrageous act from the local point of view. People talked, boiled, raged. The blatancy of the thing irritated them to the point of impotent mutterings. They were helpless. McGibbon was breaking no laws. He was stirring them, however feverish his condition of mind, with deliberate intent. It was his notion of advertising. Reaching the mark, regardless of obstacles, indifference, difficulties. And had his personal circumstances been less harrowing he could have chuckled happily at the result.

The noise fell upon the ear drums of Charlie Waterhouse as he walked down-town. A ragged, red-faced pirate thrust a *Gleaner* into his hand, snatched his nickel, and rushed off, bellowing.

Charlie began reading *Sinbad the Treasurer* as he walked. He finished it standing on the turf by the sidewalk, ignoring passing acquaintances, nervously biting and mouthing a cigar that had gone out. In the same condition he read bits of it again. He stood for a while, wavering; then went back home, and spoke roughly to Mrs Waterhouse when she asked him why. He hid the paper from her, to

no particular purpose. He didn't appear at the town hall all day, but caught a trolley into Chicago and went to a dime museum. Later in the day he was seen by two venturesome youths sitting alone in the rear of a stage box at Sam T. Jack's.

Norton P. Boice became aware of the sensation on his familiar way to the *Voice* office.

Humphrey, at his own editorial desk behind the railing, waited, apparently buried in galley proofs, for the explosion. He had caught it all after leaving Henry at Stanley's door, and had prowled a bit, taking it in.

But Mr Boice simply made little sounds—'Hmm!' and 'mmp!' and 'Hmm!' again. Then, slowly lifting his ponderous figure, the upper half of his face expressionless as always above his long yellowish-white beard, went out.

For an hour he was shut up with Mr Weston in the director's room at the bank; his huge bulk disposed in an armchair; little, low-voiced, neatly bearded Mr Weston standing by the mantel. It came down to this :—

'Could throw him into bankruptcy. He must be about broke.' Thus Boice. 'We'd get the stories that way. Suppress 'em.'

The old gentleman was still wincing from the artlessly subtle stabs he had suffered a week back in *The Caliph of Simpson Street*. Everybody within four miles of the post-office knew who the Caliph was. He had caught people hiding their smiles. Mentally he was considering a new drawn head for the *Voice*, with the phrase 'And *The Weekly Gleaner*' neatly printed just below. There never had been room for two papers in Sunbury anyway.

Mr Weston was shaking his head. 'May as well sit tight, Nort. What harm's to be done, is done already. He'll have to come down. We'll get him then.'

'You haven't got any of his paper here, have you?'

'There was one note. I called that some time ago.'

'Wha'd he do?'

'Paid it. He seems still to have a little something. But he can't last. Not without advertising.'

'But he's selling his paper fast. If he can keep that up maybe he'll begin to pick up a little along the street.'

Mr Weston was still shaking his head. 'Better walt, Nort.'

'No, I'll offer him a few hundred. The old *Gleaner* plant's worth something.'

'Of course, there's no harm in that.'

So Mr Boice crossed the street to Hemple's market and laboriously lifted his great body up the stairway beside it to the quarters of the *Gleaner* upstairs, where a coatless, rumpled, rather wild-eyed McGibbon listened to him and then, with suspiciously alert and smiling politeness, showed him out and down again.

4

The sensation struck Henry, full face, in the barber shop, Schutz and Schwartz's, whither he went from Stanley's. Professor Hennis, of the English department at the university, met him at the door and insisted on shaking hands.

'These sketches of yours, Calverly—the two I have read—are remarkable. There is a freshness of characterisation that suggests Chaucer to me. Sunbury will live to be proud of you.'

This left Henry red and mumbling, rather dumbfounded.

Then, in the chair, Bill Schwartz—fat, exuberant—said, bending over him :—

'Well, how does it feel to be famous, Henry?' And added, 'You've got 'em excited along the street here. Henry Berger says Charlie Waterhouse'll punch your head before night. Says he'll have to. Can't sue very well.'

It was after this and a few other evidences of the stir he was causing that Henry, as Humphrey had done a half-hour earlier, went prowling. He watched and followed the bellowing newsmen. He observed the lively scene at the depot when the nine-three train pulled out, from the cluttered-up window of Murphy's cigar store.

Then, keeping off Simpson Street, which was by this time crowded with the Saturday morning shopping, he slipped around Hemple's corner and up the stairs.

McGibbon sat alone in the front office—coat off, vest open, longish hair tousled, a lock straggling down across his high forehead, eyes strained and staring. He was deep in his swivel chair; long legs stretched out under the desk, smoking a five-cent cigar, hands deep in pockets.

He greeted Henry with a wry, thin-lipped smile, and waved his cigar.

'Great days!' he remarked dryly.

'Gee!' Henry dropped into a chair, laid his bamboo stick on the table, mopped a glistening face. 'Gee! You do know how to get 'em going!'

The cigar waved again.

'Sure! Stir 'em up! Soak it to 'em! Only way.'

'Everybody's buying it.'

'Rather! You're a hit, son!'

'Oh, I don't know's I'd say that.'

'Rats! You're a knockout. Never been anything like it. Two months of it and they'd be throwing your name around in Union Square, N.Y. If we only had the two months.' He sighed.

'Why!' Henry, all nerves, caught his expression. 'What's the matter?'

'We're out of paper.'

'You mean to print on?'

A nod. 'And we're out of money to buy more.'

'But with this big sale—'

'Costing four 'n' one-half times what we take in.'

'But I don't see——'

'Don't you? That's business, Hen. That's this world. You pour your money in—whip up your sales—drive, drive, *drive!* After a while it goes of itself and you get your money back. Scads of it. You're rich. That's the way with every young business. Takes nerve I tell you, and vision! Why, I know stories of the early days of—look here, what we need is money. Got to have it. Right now, while they're on the run. If we can't get it, and get it quick, well'—he reached deliberately forward, picked up a copy of the *Gleaner* and waved it high—'that—that, my son, is the last copy of the *Gleaner!*'

Henry stared with burning eyes out of a white face.

'But my stories!' he cried.

'They go to the man that gets the paper. If we land in bankruptcy, as we doubtless shall, they will be held by the court as assets.'

'But they're mine!' A note of bewilderment that was despair was in Henry's voice.

McGibbon shook his head.

'No, Hen. We're known to have them. They're in type here. You're helpless. We're both helpless. The thousand dollars you put in, too. You hold my note for that. You'll get so many cents on the dollar when the plant is sold at auction. Or if Boice buys it. He was up here just now. Offered me five hundred dollars. Think of it—five hundred for our plant, the big press and everything.'

'Wha—wha'd you say?'

'Showed him out. Laughed at him. Of course! But it was just a play. Never. Now look here, Hen, you've got a little more, haven't you? Your uncle——'

Henry had reached the limits of his emotional capacity. He was far beyond the familiar mental process known as thinking. He was sitting on the edge of his chair, knees drawn up, hands clasped tightly, temples drumming, a flush spreading down over his cheeks.

But even in this condition, thoughts came.

One of these—or perhaps it was just a feeling, a manifestation of a sort of instinct—was of hostility to Bob here. It brought a touch of guilty discomfort—hostility came hard with Henry—yet it was distinctly there. Bob was doubtless right. All his experience. And his wonderful fighting nerve. Yet somehow he wouldn't do.

'No!' said Henry. And again, 'No! Not a cent from my uncle!'

McGibbon's hand still held up the paper. He brought it down now with a bang. On the desk. And sprang up, speaking louder, with quick intense gestures.

'You don't seem to get it, Hen!' he cried. 'We're through—broke!' He glanced around at the press-room door and controlled his voice. 'No pay-roll—nothing! Nothing for the boys out there—or me—or you. I've been sitting here wondering how I can tell 'em. Got to.'

'Nothing!' Henry echoed weakly, fumbling at his little moustache—'for me?'

'Not a cent.'

'But—but——' Henry's earthly wealth at the moment was about forty cents. His rough estimate of immediate expenditures was considerable.

'Got to have money now, Hen! To-day. Before night. Can't you get hold of that fact? Even a hundred—the pay-roll's only ninety-six-fifty. If I could handle that, likely I could make a turn next week and get our paper stock in time.'

Henry heard his own voice saying:—

'But don't business men borrow——'

'Borrow! Me? In this town? They wouldn't lend me the rope to hang myself with . . . Hold on there, Hen—'

For the young man had picked up his stick and was moving toward the door. And as he hurried out he was saying, without looking back:—

'No . . . No!'

He said it on the stairs, where none could hear. He rushed around the corner, around the block. Anything to keep off Simpson Street. He had a really rather desperate struggle to keep from talking his heart out—aloud—in the street—angrily—attacking Boice, Weston, and McGibbon in the same breath. His feeling against McGibbon amounted to bitterness now. But his feeling against old Boice had risen to the borders of rage. He thought of that silent, ponderous old man, sitting at his desk in the post-office, like a spider weaving his subtle web about the town, where helpless little human flies crawled innocently about their uninspired daily tasks.

So Mr Boice had offered five hundred for plant, good will, and the stories!

No mere legal, technical claim on those stories as property, as assets, held the slightest interest for Henry. He couldn't understand that. They were his. He had created them, made them out of nothing—just a few one-cent lead pencils and a lot of copy paper. Bob had snatched them away to print them in the *Gleaner*. But they weren't Bob's.

'They're mine!' he said aloud. 'They're mine! Old Boice shan't have them! Never!' He caught himself then; looked about sharply, all hot emotion and tingling nerves.

5

A little later—it was getting on toward noon—he found himself on Filbert Avenue approaching Simpson Street. Without plan or guidance, he was heading northward, toward the rooms. It would be necessary to cross Simpson Street. He was fighting down the impulse to go several blocks to the east, toward the lake, where the stores and shops gave place to homes and lawns and shade trees, where he could slip across unnoticed; but his feet were leading him straight toward the corner of Filbert and Simpson, the busiest, most conspicuous corner in town, where were the hotel and Berger's grocery and, only a few doors off, Donovan's drug store and Swanson's flower shop and Duneen's general store and the *Voice* office. It had come down, the warfare within him, to a question of proving to himself that he wasn't a coward, that he could face disaster, even the complete disaster that seemed now to be upon him. It was like the end of the world.

In a pocket his fingers were tightly clasped about the anonymous note that had been the cloud over his troubled sleep of the night and his gloomy awakening of the morning. The note was now but a detail in the general crash. He decided to press on, march straight across Simpson Street, head high. He even brought out the note from his pocket; held it in his hand as he walked stiffly on. It was a somewhat bitter touch of bravado, but I find I like Henry none the less for it.

A little way short of the corner, it must be recorded, he faltered. It was by Berger's rear door. There was a gate in the fence here, that now stood open. Two of the Berger delivery wagons were backed in there. And right by the gate Henry Berger himself, his ample person enveloped in a long white apron, was opening a crate.

Henry sensed him there; flushed (for it seemed that he

could not speak to any human being now) and wrestled, in painful impotence of will, with the idea of moving on.

But then, through a slow moment after Mr Berger said, 'How are you, Henry!' he sensed something further; a note of good nature in the voice, a feeling that the man was smiling, a suggestion that all the genial quality had not, after all, been hardened out of life.

He turned; pulled at his moustache (paper in hand), and flicked at weeds with his stick.

Mr Berger *was* smiling. He drew his hand across a sweaty brow; shook the hand; then leaned on his hatchet.

'Getting hot,' he remarked.

Henry tried to reply, but found himself still inarticulate.

'Old Boice is getting after you. Plenty.'

Henry winced; but felt slightly reassured when Mr Berger chuckled. All intercourse with Mr Berger was tempered, however, by the memory that Henry had been caught, within the decade, stealing fruit from the cases out front.

'He was just here. Don't mind telling you that he's trying to get McGibbon's creditors together and throw him into bankruptcy. Doesn't look as if there was enough out against him, though. Got to be five hundred. It ain't as if he had a family and was running up bills. Just living alone at the Wombasts, like he does. But old Boice is out gunning for fair. Never saw him quite like this. First it was the advertising boycott . . .'

Henry was shifting his weight from foot to foot.

'Well,' he said now, 'I guess I'd better be getting along.'

'I was just going to say, Henry, that you've give me a good laugh. Keep on like this and you'll be famous some day. . . . And say! Hold on a minute! I don't know's you're in a position to do anything about it, but I was just going to say, I rather guess the old *Gleaner* could be picked up for next to nothing right now. And there's folks here that ain't so anxious to see Boice get the market all to hisself. Not so darn anxious. . . . Wait a minute! I mean, I guess once McGibbon was got rid of the Old Boy'd find it wouldn't be so easy to hold this boycott together. There's folks that would break away . . . . Well,

that's about all that was on my mind. Only I'd sorta hate to see your yarns suppressed. They're grand reading, Henry. My wife like to 'a' died over that one last week—*The Sultan of Simpson Street.*'

'"Caliph!"' said Henry, with a nervous eagerness. '*The Caliph of Simpson Street.*'

'Touched up old Norton P. for fair. Made him sorer 'n a goat. My wife's literary, and she says it's worthy of Poe. And you ought to hear the people talking to-day about this new one.'

'*Sinbad the Treasurer!*' said Henry quickly, fearing another misquotation.

'Yay-ah. That. Ain't had time to read it yet myself. They say it's great.'

'Well—good-bye,' said Henry, and moved stiffly away toward the corner.

'Funny!' mused the grocer, looking after him. 'These geniuses never have any business sense. I give him a real opening there.'

6

Simpson Street was always crowded of a Saturday morning with thoughtful housewives. The grocers and butchers bustled about. The rows of display racks along the sidewalk were heaped with fresh vegetables and fruits.

The majority of the shoppers came afoot, but the kerb was lined with buggies, surries, neat station wagons and dog-carts, crowded in between the delivery wagons. Sunbury boasted, as well, a number of Stanhopes, a barouche or two, and several landaus. The Jenkins family, among its several members, had a stable full of horses and ponies. William B. Snow owned a valuable chestnut team with silver-mounted harness. Here and there along the street one might have seen, on this occasion, several vehicles that might well have been described as smart.

But Sunbury had never seen anything like the equipage that, at a quarter to twelve—a little late for selective shopping in those days—came rolling smoothly, silently, on its rubber-shod wheels across the tracks and past the

post-office, Nelson's bakery, the Sunbury National Bank, Duneen's and Donovan's to Swanson's flower shop.

Never, never had Sunbury seen anything quite like that. Mr Berger, hurrying through to the front of his store, stopped short, stared out across the street and after a breathless moment breathed the words, 'Holy Smoke!' Women stood motionless, holding heads of lettuce, boxes of raspberries and what not, and gazed in an amazement that was actually long minutes in reaching the normal mental state of critical appraisal.

The carriage was a Victoria, hung very low, varnished work glistening brilliantly in the sunshine. It was upholstered conspicuously in plum colour. The horses were jet black, glossy, perfectly matched, checked up so high that the necks arched prettily if uncomfortably; and they had docked tails. The harness they wore was mounted with a display of silver that made the silver on William B. Snow's team, standing just below Donovan's, look outright inconspicuous.

Leaning back in luxurious comfort as the carriage came so softly along the street, holding up a parasol of black lace, overshadowing her niece, pretty little Cicely Hamlin, who sat beside her, Madame Watt, her large person dressed with costly simplicity in black with a touch of colour at the throat, square of face, with an emphatic chin, a strongly hooked nose, penetrating black eyes, surveyed the street with a commanding dignity, an assertive dignity, if the phrase may be used. Or it may have been that a touch of self-consciousness within her showed through the enveloping dignity and made you think about it. Certainly there was a final outstanding reason for self-consciousness, even in the case of Madame Watt; for on the high box in front visible for blocks above the traffic of the street, sat, in wooden perfection as in plum-coloured livery, side by side, a coachman and a footman.

At Swanson's the footman leaped nimbly down and stood rigid by the step while Madame heavily descended and passed across the walk and into the shop.

Then, and not until then, the hush that had fallen upon

the street lifted. Women's tongues moved briskly. Trade was resumed.

A pretty girl in the most wonderful carriage ever seen—a new girl, at that, bringing a stir of quickened interest to the younger set—is a magnet of considerable attracting power. Young people appeared—from nowhere, it seemed—and clustered about the carriage. Two couples hurried from the soda fountain in Donovan's. The de Casselles boys were passing on their way from the Country Club courts (which were still on the old grounds, down near the lake) in blazer coats and with expensive rackets in wooden presses. Alfred Knight was out collecting for the bank, and happened to be near. Mary Ames and Jane Bellman came over from Berger's, where Mary was scrutinising cauliflowers with a cool eye.

It was at this moment that Henry reached the corner by Berger's, paused, hopelessly confused and torn in the swirl of success and disaster that marked this painful day, fighting down that mad impulse to talk out loud his resentments in a passionate torrent of words, saw the carriage, the girl in it and the crowd about it in one nervous glance, then, suddenly pale, lips tightly compressed, moved doggedly forward across the street.

He had nearly reached the opposite kerb—not turning; with the ugly little note that was clasped in his left hand, he could not trust himself to bow, he felt a miserable sort of relief that the distance might excuse his appearing not to see; and there had to be an excuse, or it would look to some like cowardice—when an errant summer breeze wandered around the corner and seized on his straw hat.

He felt it lifting; dropped his stick; reached then after both hat and stick and in doing so nearly dropped the paper. In another moment he was to be seen, desperately white, stick in one hand, a slip of paper in the other, running straight down Simpson Street after his hat, which whirled, sailed, rolled, sailed again, circled, and settled in the dust not two rods from the Watt carriage. The street, as streets, will, turned to look.

Henry lunged for the hat. It lifted, and rolled a little way on. He lunged again. It whirled over and over,

then rolled rapidly straight down the street, just missing the hoofs of a delivery horse, passing under Mr George F. Smith's buggy without touching either horse or wheels, and sailed on.

Henry fell to one knee in his second plunge. And his pallor gave place to a hot flush.

Laughter came to his ears—jeering laughter. And it came unquestionably from the group about the Watt carriage. The first voices were masculine. Before he could get to his feet one or two of the girls had joined in. In something near despair of the spirit, helplessly, he looked up.

The whole group, still laughing, turned away. All, that is, but one. Cicely was not laughing. She was leaning a little forward, looking right at him, not even smiling, her lips parted slightly. He was too far gone even to speculate as to what her expression meant. It fell upon him as the final blow. He ran on and on. In front of Hemple's market a boy stopped the hat with his foot. Henry, trembling with rage, took it from him, muttered a word of thanks, and rushed, followed by curious eyes, around the corner to the north.

7

Humphrey found him, a little before one, at the rooms, and thought he looked ill. He was sitting on the edge of his bed, staring at a small newspaper clipping. He looked up, through his doorway, saw his friend standing in the living-room, mumbled a colourless greeting, and let his heavy eyes fall again.

'What's all this?' asked Humphrey, with a rather weary, wrinkly smile.

Henry got up then and came slowly into the living-room.

'It's this,' he explained, in a voice that was husky and light, without its usual body. 'This thing. I've had it quite a while.'

Humphrey read :—

And an address.

'What on earth are you doing with this, Hen?'

'Well, Hump, there's still a little more'n three thousand dollars in my legacy. I got a thousand this summer, you know, and lent it to McGibbon for my interest in the paper. But my uncle said he wouldn't give me a cent more until I'm twenty-one, in November. And so I was wondering . . . Look here! How much do you suppose I could get out of it from these people. They're all right, you see? They've got a regular office and——'

'You'd just about get out with your underwear and shoes, Hen. They might leave you a necktie. What do you want it for—throw it in after the thousand?'

'Well, McGibbon's broke——'

'Yes, I know. They're saying on the street that Boice has got the *Gleaner* already. Two compositors and your foreman were in our place half an hour ago asking for work. Boice went right down there. I saw him start climbing the stairs.'

'That's his second trip this morning, then, Hump. He offered Bob five hundred.'

'But it ought to be worth a few thousand.'

'Sure. And except for there not being any money it's going great. You'd be surprised! You know it's often that way. Bob says many a promising business has gone under just because they didn't have the money to tide it over a tight place. But he's getting the circulation. You've no idea! And when you get that you're bound to get the advertisers. Sooner or later. Bob says they just have to fall in line.'

Humphrey appeared to be only half listening to this eager little torrent of words. He deliberately filled his pipe; then moved over to a window and gazed soberly out at the back yard of the parsonage.

Henry, moody again, was staring at the advertisement, fairly hypnotising himself with it.

'Great to think of the Old Man having to climb those stairs twice,' Humphrey remarked, without turning. Then: 'Even with all the trouble you're going through, Hen, you're lucky not to be working for Boice. He does wear on one.'

He smoked the pipe out. Then, brows knit, his long swarthy face wrinkled deeply with thought, he walked slowly over to the door of his own bedroom and leaned there, studying the interior.

'There's three thousand dollars' worth of books in here,' he remarked. 'Or close to it. Even at second hand they'd fetch something. You see, it's really a well built, pretty complete little scientific library. Now come downstairs.'

He had to say it again: 'Come on downstairs.'

Henry followed, then; hardly aware of the oddity of Humphrey's actions.

In the half-light that sifted dustily in through the high windows, the metal lathes, large and small, the tool benches, the two large reels of piano wire, the rows of wall boxes filled with machine jars, the round objects that might have been electric motors hanging by twisted strings or wires from the ceiling joists, the heavy steel wheels of various sizes mounted in frames, some with wooden handles at one side, the big box kites and the wood-and-silk planes stacked at one end of the room, the gas engine mounted at the other end, the water motor in a corner, the wheels, shafts and belting overhead—all were indistinct, ghostly. And all were covered with dust.

'See!' Humphrey waved his pipe. 'I've done no work here for six weeks. And I shan't do any for a good while. I can't. It takes leisure—long evenings—Sundays when you aren't disturbed by a soul. And at that it means years and years, working as I've had to. You know, getting out the *Voice* every week. You know how it's been with me, Hen. People are going to fly some day, Hen. As sure as we're walking now. Pretty soon. Chanute—Langley—they know! Those are Chanute gliders over there. By the kites. I've never told you; I've worked

with 'em, moonlight nights, from the sand-dunes away up the beach. I've got some locked in an old boat-house up there, Hen'—he stood, very tall, a reminiscent, almost eager light in eyes that had been dull of late, a gaunt strong hand resting affectionately on a gyroscope—'I've flown over six hundred feet! Myself! Gliding, of course. Got an awful ducking, but I did it.

'But it takes money, Hen. I've thought I could be an inventor and do my job besides. Maybe I could. Maybe some day I'll succeed at it. But I've just come to see what it needs. Material, workmen, time—Hen, you've got to have a real shop and a real pay-roll to do it right. And . . .

'Oh, I'm not telling you the truth, Hen! Not the real truth!'

He took to walking around now, making angular gestures. Henry, watching him, coming slowly alive now to the complex life that was flowing around him, found himself confronted by a new, disturbed Humphrey. He had, during the year and more of their friendship, taken him for granted as an older, steadier influence, had leaned on him more than he knew. He had been a rock for the erratic Henry to cling to in the confusing, unstable swirl of life.

'Hen'—Humphrey turned on him—'you don't know, but I'm going to be married.'

Henry's jaw sagged.

'It's Mildred, of course.

'It's going to be hard on the little woman, Hen. She's got to get her divorce. She can't take money from her husband, of course; and she's only got a little. She'll need me.' His voice grew a thought unsteady; he waved his pipe, as if to indicate and explain the machinery. 'We've got to strike out—take the plunge— You know, make a little money. It's occurred to me . . . This machinery's worth more than the library, in a pinch. And I've got two bonds left. Just two. They're money, of course. . . . . Hen, you said you *lent* that thousand to McGibbon?'

Henry nodded. 'He gave me his note.'

'Let's see it.'

Henry ran up the stairs, and returned with a pasteboard box file, which, not without a momentary touch of pride in his quite new business sense, he handed to his friend.

Humphrey glanced at the carefully printed-out phrase on the back—'Henry Calverly, 3rd. Business Affairs'—but did not smile. He opened it and ran through the indexed leaves. It appeared to be empty.

'Look under "Mc,"' said Henry.

The note was there. 'For three months,' Humphrey mused aloud.

Then he smiled. There was a whimsical touch in Humphrey that his few friends knew and loved. Even in this serious crisis it did not desert him. I believe it was even stronger then.

'Hen,' he said, 'got a quarter?'

The smile seemed to restore the rock that Henry had lately clung to. He found himself returning the smile, faintly but with a growing warmth. He replied, 'Just about.'

'Match me!' cried Humphrey.

'What for?'

'To settle a very important point. Somebody's name has got to come first. Best two out of three.'

'But I don't——'

'Match me! No—it's mine! . . . Now I'll match you—mine again! I win. Well—that's settled!'

'What's settled? I don't——'

Humphrey sat on a tool bench; swung his legs; grinned. 'Life moves on, Hen,' he said. 'It's a dramatic old world.'

And Henry, puzzled, looking at him, laughed excitedly.

8

It was two o'clock in the afternoon. Simpson Street was quiet after the brisk business of the morning. The air quivered up from the pavement in the still heat. The occasional people about the street moved slowly. The collars of the few visible tradesmen were soft rags around

their necks and they mopped red faces with saturated handkerchiefs. The morning breeze had died; the afternoon breeze would drift in at four o'clock or so; until which time Sunbury ladies took their naps and Sunbury business men dozed at their desks. Saturday closing had not made much headway at this period, though the still novel game of golf was beginning to work its mighty change in small-town life.

Through this calm scene, absorbed in their affairs, unaware of the heat, strode Humphrey and Henry—down past the long hotel veranda, where the yellow rocking chairs stood in endless empty rows, past Swanson's and Donovan's and Jackson's book store to the meat market and then, rapidly, up the long stairway.

They found McGibbon with his long legs stretched out under his desk, hands deep in pockets, thin face lined and weary, but eyes nervously bright as always. He was in his shirt-sleeves, of course. His drab brown hair seemed a little longer and even more ragged than usual where it met his wilted collar.

But he grinned at them, and waved a long hand.

'My God!' he cried, 'but it's good to see a human face. Look!' His hand swept around, indicating the dusty, deserted desks and the open press-room door. It was still out there; not a man hummed or whistled as he clicked type into his stick, not one of the four job presses rumbled out its cheerful drone of industry.

'Rats all gone!' McGibbon added. 'But the Caliph was up again.'

'Yes,' Henry, who found himself suddenly and deeply moved, breathed softly, 'we know.'

'Came up a hundred. He'll pay six hundred now. For all this. An actual investment of more'n four thousand.' The hand waved again. 'It's amusing. He doesn't know I'm on to him. You see the old fox's been nosing around to get up a petition to throw me into involuntary bankruptcy, but he can't find any creditors. Has to be five hundred dollars, you know.'

'What did you say to him?' asked Humphrey, thoughtfully.

'Showed him out. Second time to-day. It was a hard climb for him, too. He did puff some.'

Humphrey slowly drew a large envelope from an inner pocket and laid it on the table at his elbow.

McGibbon eyed it alertly.

'Here!' he said, his hand moving up toward the row of four or five cigars that projected from a vest pocket, 'smoke up, you fellows.'

Henry shook his head. Humphrey drew out his pipe; then raised his head, and said quietly:—

'Listen!'

There came the unmistakable sound of heavy feet on the stairs. Steadily, step by step, a slowly moving body mounted.

Then, framed in the doorway, stood the huge bulk of Norton P. Boice, breathless, red, and wet of face, his old straw hat pushed back, his yellowish-white, wavy beard covering his necktie and the upper part of his roundly protruding, slightly spotted vest, against which the heavy watch chain with its dangling fraternal insignia stood out prominently.

Bocie's eyes, nearly expressionless, finally settled on Humphrey.

'What are you doing here?' he asked, between puffs.

Humphrey's only reply was a slight impatient gesture.

'You oughta be at your desk.'

Then he came into the room. Of the three men seated there Humphrey was the only one who knew by certain small external signs, that the Caliph of Simpson Street was blazing with wrath. For here was his own hired lieutenant hobnobbing with the boy whose agile, irresponsible pen had made him the laughing stock of the township and with the intemperate rival who had first attacked and then defied him. And then he had just climbed the stairs for the third and what he meant to be the last time.

He came straight to business.

'Have you decided to accept my offer?'

'Sit down,' said McGibbon, pushing a chair over with his foot.

Boice ignored this final bit of insolence.

'Have you decided to accept my offer?'

'Well'—McGibbon shrugged; spread out his hands—'I've decided nothing, but as it looks now I may find myself forced to accept it.'

'Then I suggest that you accept it now.'

'Well——' the hands went out again.

'Wait a moment,' said Humphrey.

'I think you had better go back to the office,' Boice broke in.

'Shortly. I have no intention of leaving you in the lurch, Mr Boice. But first I have business here.'

'*You* have business!'

'Yes.' Humphrey opened the large envelope. 'Here, McGibbon, is your note to Henry for one thousand dollars, due in November.'

Before their eyes, deliberately, he tore it up, leaned over McGibbon's legs with an, 'I beg your pardon!' and dropped the pieces in the waste-basket. Next he produced a folded document engraved in green and red ink. 'Here,' he concluded, 'is a four per cent. railway bond that stands to-day at a hundred two and a quarter in the market. That's our price for the *Gleaner*.'

McGibbon's nervous eyes followed the movements of Humphrey's hands as if fascinated. During the hush that followed he sat motionless, chin on breast. Then, slowly, he drew in his legs, straightened up, reached for the bond, turned it over, opened it and ran his eye over the coupons, looked up and remarked:—

'The paper's yours.'

'Then, Mr Boice,' said Humphrey, 'the next issue of the *Gleaner* will be published by Weaver and Calverly, and the stories you object to will run their course.'

But Mr Boice, creaking deliberately over the floor, was just disappearing through the doorway.

9

The sunlight was streaming in through the living-room of the barn back of the old Parmenter place. Outside the maple leaves were rustling gently. Through the quiet air

came the slow booming of the First Presbyterian bell across the block. From greater distances came the higher pitched bell of the Baptist Church, down on Filbert Avenue, and the faint note from the Second Presbyterian over on the West Side, across the tracks.

Humphrey had made coffee and toast. They sat at an end of the centre table. Humphrey in bath-robe and slippers, Henry fully dressed in his blue serge suit, neat silk four-in-hand tie, stiff white collar and carefully polished shoes.

'Where are you going with all that?' Humphrey asked.

Henry hesitated; flushed a little.

'To church,' he finally replied.

Humphrey's surprise was real. There had been a time, before they came to know each other, when the boy had sung bass in the quartet at the Second Presbyterian. But since that period he had not been a church-goer. Henry had been quiet all evening, and now this morning. He seemed all boxed up within himself. Preoccupied. As if the triumph over old Boice had merely opened up the way to new responsibilities. Which, for that matter, was just what it had done—done to both of them. Humphrey, not being given to prying, would have let the subject drop here, had not Henry surprised him by breaking hotly forth into words.

'It's my big fight, Hump!' he was saying now. 'Don't you see! This town. All they say. Look here!' He laid a rumpled bit of paper on the table. As if he had been holding it ready in his hand.

'Oh, that letter,' said Humphrey.

'Yes. It's what I've got to fight. And I've got to win. Don't you see?'

'Yes,' Humphrey replied gravely, 'I see.'

'I think,' said Henry, 'it's being in love that's going to help me. We've got to hold our heads up, you and I. Build the *Gleaner* into a real property. Win confidence. And there mustn't be any doubt. The way we step out and fight, you know. I've got to stand with you.'

Humphrey's eyes strayed to the sunlit window. He suppressed a little sigh.

'This note's right enough, in a way,' Henry went on. 'It wouldn't be fair to compromise her.' He leaned earnestly over the table. 'It's really a hopeless love. I know that, Hump. But it isn't like the others. It makes me feel ashamed of them. All of them. I've got to show her, or at least show myself, that it's this love that has made a man of me. Without asking anything, you know.'

Humphrey listened in silence as the talk ran on. The boy was changing, no question about that. Even back of the romantic strain that was colouring his attitude, the suggestion of pose in it, there was real evidence of this change. At least his fighting blood was up. And he was taking punishment.

Sitting there sipping his coffee, Humphrey, half listening, soberly considered his younger friend. Henry was distinctly odd, a square peg in a round world. He was capable of curiously outrageous acts, yet most of them seemed to arise from a downright inability to sense the common attitude, to feel with his fellows. He could be heedless, neglectful, self-centred; but Humphrey had never found meanness or unkindness in him. And he was capable of a passionate generosity. He had, indeed, for Humphrey, the fascination that an erratic and ingenuous but gifted person often exerts on older, steadier natures. You could be angry at him; but you couldn't get over the feeling that you had to take care of him. And it always seemed, even when he was out and out exasperating, that the thing that was the matter with him was the very quality that underlay his astonishing gifts; that he was really different from others; the difference ran all through, from his unexpected, rather self-centred ways of acting and reacting clear up to the fact that he could write what other people couldn't write. 'If they could,' thought Humphrey now, shrewdly, 'very likely they'd be different too.' Take this business of dressing up like a born suburbanite and going to church. It was something of a romantic gesture. But that wasn't all it was. The fight was real, whatever unexpected things it might lead him to do from day to day.

Herbert de Casselles, wooden-faced, dressed impeccably in frock coat, heavy 'Ascot' tie, gray striped trousers

perfectly creased, (Henry had never owned a frock coat) ushered him half-way down the long aisle to a seat in Mrs Ellen F. Wilson's pew. He felt eyes on him as he walked, imagined whispers, and set his face doggedly against them all. He had set out in a sort of fervour; but now the thing was harder to do than he had imagined. The people looked cold and hostile. It was to be a long fight. He might never win. The more successful he might come to be, the more some of them would hate him and fight him down . . . It was queer, Herb de Casselles ushering him.

The organist slid on to his seat, up in the organ loft behind the pulpit; spread out his music and turned up the corners; pulled and pushed on stops and couplers; glanced up into his narrow mirror; adjusted his tie; fussed again with the stops; began to play.

Henry sat up stiffly, even boldly, and looked about.

Across the church, in a pew near the front, sat the Watts : the Senator, on the aisle, looking curiously insignificant with his meek, red face and his little, slightly askew chin beard; Madame Watt sitting wide and high over him, like a stout hawk, chin up, nose down, beady eyes fixed firmly on the pulpit; Cicely Hamlin almost fragile beside her, eyes downcast—or was she looking at the hymns?

When Cicely was talking, with her nervous eagerness, her quick smile, her almost Frenchy gestures, she seemed gay. When in repose, as now, her delicate sensitiveness, her slightly sad expression, were evident, even to Henry. He was incapable of studying her impersonally, of course. But she made him feel something as Sothern had made him feel in the closing scene of *The Prisoner of Zenda*, where he was bidding the Princess who could never be his a last farewell; the mere sight of her thrilled him with a deep romantic sorrow.

Through the prayers, the announcements, the choir numbers and collection, his sacrificial mood grew more and more intense. It was something of a question whether he could hide his emotion before all these hostile people. The long fight ahead to rebuild his name in the village loomed larger and larger, began to take on an aspect that was almost terrifying. For the first time to-day he felt weakness

in his heart. He sat very quiet, hands clenched on his knees, and unconsciously thrust out his chin a little.

When the doxology was sung and his head was bowed for the benediction, he had to struggle with a mad impulse to rush out, run down the aisle while people were picking up their hats and things. The thing to do, of course, was to take his time, be natural, move out with the rest. This he did, blazing with self-consciousness, his chin forward.

It was difficult. Several persons—older persons, who had known his mother—stopped him and congratulated him on the brilliant work he was doing. This in the midst of the unuttered hostility that seemed like hundreds of little barbed darts penetrating his skin from every side. He could only blush and mumble. Elderly, innocent Mrs Bedford of Filbert Avenue actually introduced him to her nieces from Boston as a young man of whom all Sunbury was proud. He had to blush and mumble here for a long time, while the line of people crowded decorously past.

At last he got to the door. Stiffly raising his hat as one or two groups of young people recognised him, he moved out to the sidewalk. There he raised his eyes. They met, for a fleeting instant, but squarely, over Herb de Casselles' shoulder, the dark eyes of Cicely Hamlin.

She was sitting on the little forward seat in the black-and-plum Victoria. Madame Watt was settling herself in the back seat. The Senator was stepping in. The plum-coloured footman stood stiffly by. The plum-coloured driver sat stiffly on the box.

Herb de Casselles turned, with a wry smile.

Henry raised his hat, bit his lip, hesitated, hurried on.

Then he heard her voice.

'Oh, Mr Calverly!'

He had to turn back. He knew he was fiery red. He knew, too, that in this state of tortured bewilderment he couldn't trust his tongue for a moment.

Cicely leaned out, with outstretched hand.

He had to take it. The thrill the momentary touch of it gave him but added a wrench to the torture. Then the Senator's hand had to be taken; finally Madame's.

His pulse was racing; pounding at his temples. What did all this mean!

Cicely, her own colour up a little, speaking quickly, her face lighting up, her hands moving, cried :—

'Oh, Mr Calverly! We heard this morning that the *Gleaner* has failed and that Mr Boice has it and we aren't to see your stories any more.'

'No,' said Henry, a faint touch of assurance appearing in his heart, mind, voice, 'that isn't so. Mr Boice hasn't got it. We've got it—Humphrey Weaver and I.'

'You mean you have purchased it?' This from the Senator.

'Yay-ah, We bought it yesterday.'

'No!' cried Cicely. 'Really?'

'Yay-ah. We bought it.'

'Then,' commented the Senator, 'you must permit me indeed to congratulate you. It is unusual to find business acumen and enterprise combined with such a literary talent as yours.'

This was pleasing, if stilted. It was beginning to be possible for Henry to smile.

Then Cicely clinched matters.

'You promised to come and read me the others, Mr Calverly. Oh, but you did! You must come. Really! Let me see—I know I shall be at home to-morrow evening.'

Then, for a moment, Cicely seemed to falter. She turned questioningly to her aunt.

Madame Watt certainly knew the situation. She had heard Henry discussed in relation to the Mamie Wilcox incident. She knew how high feeling was running in the village. Just what her motives were, I cannot say. Perhaps it was her tendency to make her own decisions and if possible to make different decisions from those of the folk about her. The instinct to stand out aggressively in all matters was strong within her. And she liked Henry. The flare of extreme individuality in him probably reached her and touched a curiously different strain of extreme individuality within herself. She hated sheep. Henry was not a sheep.

As for Cicely's part of it, I know she had been thrilled

when Henry read her the first ten stories. She had read more than the Sunbury girls; and she saw more in his oddities than they were capable of seeing. To fail in any degree to conform to the prevailing customs and thought was to be ridiculous in Sunbury. But she had no more forgotten the jeers that had followed Henry from this very carriage as he chased his hat down Simpson Street the preceding day than had Henry himself. Nor had she forgotten that Herbert de Casselles had been one of that unkind group. And as she certainly knew what she was about, despite her impulsiveness, I prefer to think that her action was deliberately kind and deliberately brave.

'Come to dinner,' said Madame Watt shortly but with a sort of rough cordiality. 'Seven o'clock. To-morrow evening. Informal dress. All right, Watson.'

Cicely settled back, her eyes bright; but gave Henry only the same suddenly impersonal little nod of good-bye that she gave Herbert de Casselles.

The footman leaped to the box. The remarkable carriage rolled luxuriously away on its rubber tyres.

Henry turned, grinning in foolish happiness, on the young man in the frock coat who had not been asked to dinner.

'Walking up toward Simpson, Herb?' he asked.

'Me—why—no, I'm going this way.' And Herb pointed hurriedly southward.

'Well—so long!' said Henry, and headed northward.

The warm sunlight filtered down through the dense foliage. Birds twittered up there. The church procession moving slowly along was brightly dressed; pleasant to see. Henry, head up, light of foot, smiling easily when this or that person, after a moment's hesitation, bowed to him, listened to the birds, expanded his chest in answer to the mellowing sunshine, and gave way, with a fresh little thrill, to the thought :—

'I must buy a frock coat for to-morrow night.'

VIII

THIS BUD OF LOVE

I

It was mid-August and twenty minutes to eight in the evening. The double rows of maples threw spreading shadows over the pavement, sidewalk and lawns of Hazel Avenue. From dim houses, set far back amid trees and shrubs, giving a homy village quality to the darkness, came through screened doors and curtained 'bay' windows the yellow glow of oil lamps and the whiter shine of electric lights. Here and there a porch light softly illuminated a group of young people; their chatter and laughter, with perhaps a snatch of song, floating pleasantly out on the soft evening air. Around on a side street, sounding faintly, a youthful banjoist with soft fingers and inadequate technique was struggling with *The March Past.*

Moving in a curious, rather jerky manner along the street, now walking swiftly, nervously, now hesitating, even stopping, in some shadowy spot, came a youth of twenty (going on twenty-one). He wore—though all these details were hardly distinguishable even in the patches of light at the street corners, where arc lamps sputtered whitely—neatly pressed white trousers, a 'sack' coat of blue serge, a five-dollar straw hat, silk socks of a pattern and a silken 'four-in-hand' tie. He carried a cane of thin bamboo that he whipped and flicked at the grass and rattled lightly along the occasional picket fence except when he was fussing at the light growth on his upper lip. Under his left arm was a square package that any girl of Sunbury would have recognised instantly, even in the shadows, as a two-pound box of Devoe's chocolates.

If you had chanced to be a resident of Sunbury at this period you would have known that the youth was Henry

Calverly, 3rd. Though you might have had no means of knowing that he was about to 'call' on Cicely Hamlin. Or, except perhaps from his somewhat spasmodic locomotion, that he was in a state of considerable nervous excitement.

Not that Henry hadn't called on many girls in his day. He had. But he had called only once before on Cicely (the other time had been that invitation to dinner for which her aunt was really responsible) and had then, in a burning glow of temperament, read her his stories.

How he had read! And read! And read! Until midnight and after. She had been enthusiastic, too.

But he wasn't in a glow now. Certain small incidents had lately brought him to the belief that Cicely Hamlin lacked the pairing-off instinct so common among the young of Sunbury. She had been extra nice to him; true. But the fact stood that she was not 'going with' him. Not in the Sunbury sense of the phrase. A baffling, disturbing aura of impersonally pleasant feeling held him at a distance.

So he was just a young fellow setting forth, with chocolates, to call on a girl. A girl who could be extra nice to you and then go out of her way to maintain pleasant acquaintance with the others, your rivals, your enemies. Almost as if she felt she had been a little too nice and wished to strike a balance; at least he had thought of that. A girl who had been reared strangely in foreign convents; who didn't know *The Spanish Cavalier* or *Seeing Nellie Home* or *Solomon Levi*, yet did know, strangely, that the principal theme in Dvorak's extremely new 'New World' symphony was derived from *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot* (which illuminating fact had stirred Henry to buy, regardless, the complete piano score of that symphony and struggle to pick out the themes on Humphrey's piano at the rooms). A girl who had never seen De Wolf Hopper in *Wang*, or the Bostonians in *Robin Hood*, or Sothern in *The Prisoner of Zenda*, or Maude Adams or Ethel Barrymore or *anything*. A girl who had none of the direct, free and easy ways of the village young; you couldn't have started a rough-house with her—mussed her hair, or galloped her in

the two-step. A girl who wasn't stuck up, or anything like that, who seemed actually shy at times, yet subtly repressed you, made you wish you could talk like the fellows that had gone to Harvard.

In view of these rather remarkable facts I think it really was a tribute to Cicely Hamlin that the many discussions of her as a conspicuous addition to the youngest set had boiled down to the single descriptive adjective, 'tactful.' Though the characterisation seems not altogether happy; for the word, to me, connotes something of conscious skill and management—as my Crabb put it: 'TACTFUL. See Diplomatic'—and Cicely was not, certainly not in those days, a manager.

Henry muttered softly, as he walked.

'I'll hand it to her when she comes in.

'No, she'll shake hands and it might get in the way.

'Put it on the table—that's the thing!—on a corner where she'll see it.

'Then some time when we can't think of anything to talk about, I'll say—"Thought you might like a few chocolates." Sorta offhand. Prevent there being a lull in the conversation.

'Better begin calling her Cicely.'

'Why not? Shucks! Can't go on with "You" and "Say!" Why can't I just do it naturally? The way Herb would, or Elbow, or those fellows.

'"How'd' you do, Cicely! Come on, let's take a walk."

'No. "Good-evening, Cicely. I thought maybe you'd like to take a walk. There's a moonrise over the lake about half-past eight." That's better.

'Wonder if Herb'll be there. He'd hardly think to come so early, though. Be all right if I can get her away from the house by eight.'

He paused, held up his watch to the light from the corner, then rushed on.

'Maybe she'd ask me to sit him out, anyway.'

But his lips clamped shut on this. It was just the sort of thing Cicely wouldn't do. He knew it.

'What if she won't go out!'

This sudden thought brought bitterness. A snicker had

run its course about town—in his eager self-absorption he had wholly forgotten—when Alfred Knight, confident in an engagement to call, had hired a horse and buggy at McAllister's. The matter of an evening drive *a deux* had been referred to Cicely's aunt. As a result the horse had stood hitched outside more than two hours only to be driven back to the livery stable by the gloomy Al.

'Shucks, though! Al's a fish! Don't blame her!'

He walked stiffly in among the trees and shrubs of the old Dexter Smith place and mounted the rather imposing front steps.

That purchase of the Dexter Smith place was typical of Madame Watt at the time. She was riding high. She had money. Two acres of lawn, fine old trees, a great square house of Milwaukee brick, high spacious rooms with elaborately moulded plaster ceilings and a built-on conservatory and a barn that you could keep half a dozen carriages in! It was one of only four or five houses in Sunbury that the *Voice* and the *Gleaner* rejoiced to call 'mansions.' And it was the only one that could have been bought. The William B. Snows, like the Jenkinses and the de Casselles (I don't know if it has been explained before that the accepted local pronunciation was Dekasells,) lived in theirs. And even after the elder Dexter Smith died Mrs Smith would hardly have sold the place if the children hadn't nagged her into it. Young Dex wanted to go to New York. And at that it was understood that Madame Watt paid two prices.

2

A uniformed butler showed Henry into the room that he would have called the front parlour. Though there was another much like it across the wide hall. There was a 'back parlour,' with portières between. Out there, he knew, between centre table and fireplace, the Senator and Madame might even now be sitting.

He listened, on the edge of a huge plush and walnut chair, for the rustle of the Senator's paper, or Madame's deep, always startling voice.

There was no sound. Save that somewhere upstairs, far off, a door opened; then footsteps very faint. And silence again.

Henry looked, fighting down misgivings, at the heavily framed oil paintings on the wall. One, of a life-boat going out through mountainous waves to a wreck, he had always heard was remarkably fine. Fastened over the bow of the boat was a bit of real rope that had provoked critical controversy when the picture was first exhibited in Chicago.

He glanced down, discovered the box of chocolates on his knees, and hurriedly placed it on the corner of the inevitable centre table. Then he fussed nervously with his moustache; adjusted his tie, wondering if the stick pin should be higher; pulled down his cuffs; and sat up stiffly again.

'Maybe she ain't home,' he thought weakly. 'That fella said he'd see.'

'Maybe I oughta've asked if she'd be in.'

The silence deepened, spread, settled about him. He wished she would come down. There was danger, he knew, that his few painfully thought-out conversational openings would leave him. He would be an embarrassed, quite speechless young man. For he was as capable, even now, at twenty, almost at twenty-one, of speechlessness as of volubility. Either might happen to him, at any moment, from the smallest, least foreseeable of causes.

And there was something oppresive about the stillness of this cavernous old house with its sound-proof partitions and its distances. And that silent machine of a butler. It wasn't like calling at Martha Caldwell's, in the old days, where you could hear the Swedish cook crashing around in the kitchen and Martha moving around upstairs before she came down. Here you wouldn't so much as know there was a kitchen.

Then, suddenly, sharp as a blow out of the stillness came a series of sounds that froze the marrow in his bones, made him rigid on the edge of that plush chair, his lips parted, his eyes staring, wrestling with an impulse to dash out of the house; with another impulse to cough, or shout, or play the piano, in some mad way to announce himself,

yet continuing to sit like a carved idol, in the grip of a paralysis of the faculties.

There is nothing more painful to the young than the occasional discovery, through the mask of social reticence, that the old have their weak or violent moments.

Gossip, yes! But gossip rests lightly and briefly in young ears. Henry had heard the Watts slyly ridiculed. There were whispers, of course. Madame's career as a French countess—well, naturally Sunbury wondered. And the long obscurity from which she had rescued Senator Watt raised questions about that very quiet little man. So often men in political life were tempted off the primly beaten track. And Henry, like the other young people, had grinned in awed delight over the tale that Madame swore at her servants. That was before he had so much as spoken to her niece. And it had little or no effect on his attitude toward Madame herself when he met her. She had at once taken her place in the compartment of his thoughts reserved from earliest memory for his elders, whose word was (at least in honest theory) law and to whom one looked up with diffidence and a genuine if somewhat automatic respect.

The first of the disturbing sounds was Madame's voice, far-off but ringing strong. Then a door opened—it must have been the dining-room door; not the wide one that opened into the great front hall, but the other, at the farther end of the 'back parlour.'

There was a brief lull. A voice could be heard, though—a man's voice, low-pitched, deprecatory.

Then Madame's again. And stranger noises. The man's voice cried out in quick protest; there was a rustle and then a crash like breaking china.

The Senator, hurrying a little, yet with a sort of dignity, walked out into the hall. Henry could see him, first between the portières as he left the room, then as he passed the hall door.

There was a rush and a torrent of passionately angry words from the other room. An object—it appeared to be a paper weight or ornament—came hurtling out into the hall. The Senator, who had apparently gone to the

closet by the door for his hat and stick—for he came back into the hall with them—stepped back just in time to avoid being struck. The object fell on the stair, landing with the sound of solid metal.

'You come back here!' Madame's voice.

'I will not come back until you have had time to return to your senses,' replied the Senator. He looked very small. He was always stilted in speech; Humphrey had said that he talked like the *Congressional Record*. 'This is a disgraceful scene. If you have the slightest regard for my good name or your own you will at least make an effort to compose yourself. Some one might be at the door at this moment. You are a violent, ungoverned woman, and I am ashamed of you.'

'And you'—she was almost screaming now—'are the man who was glad to marry me.'

He ignored this. 'If any one asks for me, I shall be at the Sunbury Club.'

'Going to drink again, are you?'

'I think not.'

'If you do, you needn't come back. Do you hear? You needn't come back!'

He turned, and with a sort of strut went out the front door.

She started to follow. She did come as far as the portières. Henry had a glimpse of her, her face red and distorted.

She turned back then, and seemed to be picking up the room. He could hear sniffing and actually snorting as she moved about. There was a brief silence. Then she crossed the hall, a big imposing person—even in her tantrums she had presence—and went up the stairs, pausing on the landing to pick up the object she had thrown. Her solid footfalls died out on the thick carpets of the upper hall. A door opened, and slammed faintly shut.

Silence again.

Henry found that he was clutching the arms of the chair.

'I must relax,' he thought vacantly; and drew a slow deep breath, as he had been taught in a gymnasium class at the Y.M.C.A.

He brushed a hand across his eyes. Now that it was over, his temples were pounding hotly, his nerves aquiver.

It was incredible. Yet it had happened. Before his eyes. A vulgar brawl; a woman with a red face throwing things. And he was here in the house with her. He might have to try to talk with her.

He considered again the possibility of slipping out. But that butler had taken his name up. Cicely would be coming down any moment. Unless she knew.

Did she know? Had she heard? Possibly not.

Henry got slowly, indecisively up and wandered to the piano; stood leaning on it.

His eyes filled. All at once, in his mind's eye, he could see Cicely. Particularly the sensitive mouth. And the alert brown eyes. And the pretty way her eyebrows moved when she spoke or smiled or listened—always with a flattering attention—to what you were saying.

He brought a clenched fist down softly on the piano.

3

'Oh,' cried the voice of Cicely—'there you are! How nice of you to come!'

She was standing—for a moment—in the doorway.

White of face, eyes burning, his fist still poised on the piano, he stared at her.

She didn't know! Surely she didn't—not with that bright smile.

She wore the informal, girlish costume of the moment—neatly fitting dark skirt; simple shirt-waist with the ballooning sleeves that were then necessary; stiff boyish linen collar propping the chin high, and little bow tie; darkish, crisply waving hair brought into the best order possible, parted in the middle and carried around and down over the ears to a knot low on the neck.

'I brought some candy,' he cried fiercely. 'There! On the table!'

She knit her brows for a brief moment. Then opened the box.

'How awfully nice of you! . . . You'll have some?'

'No. I don't eat candy. I was thinking of—I want to get you out—Come on, let's take a walk!'

She smiled a little, around a chocolate. Surely she didn't know!

She had seemed, during her first days in Sunbury, rather timid at times. But there was in this smile more than a touch of healthy self-confidence. No girl, indeed, could find herself making so definite a success as Cicely had made here from her first day without acquiring at least the beginnings of self-confidence. It was a success that had forced Elbow Jenkins and Herb de Casselles to ignore small rebuffs and persist in fighting over her. It permitted her, even in a village where social conformity was the breath of life, to do odd, unexpected things. Such as allowing herself to be interested, frankly, in Henry Calverly.

So she smiled as she nibbled a chocolate.

He said it again, breathlessly:—

'I was thinking of asking you to take a walk.'

'Well'—still that smile—'why don't you?'

But he was still in a daze, and pressed stupidly on. 'It's a fine evening. And the moon'll be coming up.'

'I'll get my sweater,' she said quietly, and went out to the hall.

She was just turning away from the hall closet with the sweater—he, hat and stick in hand, was fighting back the memory of how Senator Watt had marched stiffly to that same closet—when Madame Watt came down the stairs, scowling intently, still breathing hard.

She saw them; came toward them; stood, pursing her lips, finally forcing a sort of smile.

'Oh, howdadoo!' she remarked, toward Henry.

Her black eyes focused pointedly on him. And while he was mumbling a greeting, she broke in on him with this:—

'I didn't know you were here. Did you just come?'

Henry's eyes lowered. Then, as utter silence fell, the colour surging to his face, he raised them. They met her black, alarmed stare. He felt that he ought to lie about this, lie like a good one. But he didn't know how.

Slowly, all confusion, he shook his head.

During a long moment they held that gaze, the vigorous, strangely interesting woman of wealth and of what must have been a violent past, and the gifted, sensitive youth of twenty. When she turned away, they had a secret.

'We thought of taking a little walk,' said Cicely.

Madame moved briskly away into the back parlour, merely throwing back over her shoulder, in a rather explosive voice: 'Have a good time!'

The remark evidently struck Cicely as somewhat out of character. She even turned, a little distrait, and looked after her aunt.

Then, as they were passing out the door, Madame's voice boomed after them. She was hurrying back through the hall.

'By the way,' she said, with a frowning, determined manner, 'we are having a little theatre party Saturday night. A few of Cicely's friends. Dinner here at six. Then we go in on the seven-twenty. I know Cicely'll be glad to have you. Informal—don't bother to dress.'

'Oh, yes!' cried Cicely, looking at her aunt.

'I—I'm sure I'd be delighted,' said Henry heavily.

Then they went out, and strolled in rather oppressive quiet toward the lake.

There was a summer extravaganza going, at the Auditorium. That must be the theatre. They hadn't meant to ask him, of course. Not at this late hour. It hurt, with a pain that, a day or so back, would have filled Henry's thoughts. But Cicely's smile, as she stood by the table, nibbling a chocolate, the poise of her pretty head—the picture stood out clearly against a background so ugly, so unthinkably vulgar, that it was like a deafening noise in his brain.

4

He glanced sidewise at Cicely. They were walking down Douglass Street. Just ahead lay the still, faintly shimmering lake, stretching out to the end of the night and beyond. Already the whispering sound reached their ears of ripples

lapping at the shelving beach. And away out, beyond the dim horizon, a soft brightness gave promise of the approaching moonrise.

He stole another glance at Cicely. He could just distinguish her delicate profile.

He thought: 'How could she ask me? They wouldn't like it, her friends. Mary Ames mightn't want to come. Martha Caldwell, even. She's been nice to me. I mustn't make it hard for her. And she mustn't know about to-night. Not ever.'

Then a new thought brought pain. If there had been one such scene, there would be others. And she would have to live against that background, keeping up a brave face before the prying world of Sunbury. Perhaps she had already lived through something of the sort. That sad look about her mouth; when she didn't know you were looking.

They had reached the boulevard now, and were standing at the railing over the beach. A little talk had been going on, of course, about this and that—he hardly knew what.

He clenched his fist again, and brought it down on the iron rail.

'Oh,' he broke out—'about Saturday. I forgot. I can't come.'

'Oh, but please——'

'No. Awfully busy. You've no idea. You see Humphrey Weaver and I bought the *Gleaner*. I told you, didn't I? It's a big responsibility—getting the pay-roll every week, and things like that. Things I never knew about before. I don't believe I was made to be a business man. Lots of accounts and things. Hump's at it all the time—nights and everything. You see we've got to make the paper pay. We've *got* to! It was losing, when Bob McGibbon had it. People hated him, and they wouldn't advertise. And now we have to get the advertising back. If we fail in that, we'll go under, just as he did . . .'

Words! Words! A hot torrent of them! He didn't know how transparent he was.

She stood, her two hands resting lightly on the rail, looking out at the slowly spreading glow in the east.

'I'm so glad aunt asked you,' she said gravely. 'I wanted you to come. I want you to know. Won't you, please?'

He looked at her, but she didn't turn. There was more behind her words. Even Henry could see that. He had been discussed. As a problem. But she didn't say the rest of it.

Then his clumsy little artifice broke down, and the crude feeling rushed to the surface.

'You know I mustn't come!' he cried.

'No,' said she, with that deliberate gravity. 'I don't know that. I think you should.'

'I can't. You don't understand. They wouldn't like it, my being there. They talk about me. They don't speak to me, even.'

'Then oughtn't you to come? Face them? Show them that it isn't true?'

'But that will just make it hard for you.'

She was slow in answering this; seemed to be considering it. Finally she replied with :—

'I don't think I care about that. People have been awfully nice to me here. I'm having a lovely time. But it isn't as if I had always lived here and expected to stay for the rest of my life. My life has been different. I've known a good many different kinds of people, and I've had to think for myself a good deal. No, I'd like you to come. If you don't come—don't you see?—you're putting me with them. You're making me mean and petty. I don't want to be that way. If—if I'm to see you at all, they must know it.'

'Perhaps, then,' he muttered, 'you'd better not see me at all.'

'Please!'

'Well, I know; but——'

'No. I want to see you. If you want to come. I love your stories. You're more interesting than any of them.'

At this, he turned square around; stared at her. But she, very quietly, finished what she had to say. 'I think you're a genius. I think you're going to be famous. It's

—it's exciting to see the way you write stories. . . . Wait, please! I'm going to tell you the rest of it. Now that we're talking it out, I think I've got to. It was aunt who didn't want to ask you. She likes you, but she thought —well, she thought it might be awkward, and—and hard for you. I told her what I've told you, that I've either got to be your friend before all of them or not at all. And now that she has asked you—don't you see, it's the way I wanted it all along.'

There wasn't another girl in Sunbury who could have, or would have, made quite that speech.

She looked delicately beautiful in the growing light. Her hair was a vignetted halo about her small head.

Henry, staring, his hands clenched at his sides, broke out with :—

'I love you!'

'Oh—h!' she breathed. 'Please!'

Words came from him, a jumble of words. About his hopes, the few thousand dollars that would be his on the seventh of November, when he would be twenty-one, the wonderful stories he would write, with her for inspiration.

Inwardly he was in a panic. He hadn't dreamed of saying such a thing. Never before, in all his little philanderings had he let go like this, never had he felt the glow of mad catastrophe that now seemed to be consuming him. Oh, once perhaps—something of it—years back—when he had believed he was in love with Ernestine Lambert. But that had been in another era. And it hadn't gone so deep as this.

'Anyway'—he heard her saying, in a rather tired voice —'anyway—it makes it hard, of course—you shouldn't have said that——'

'Oh, I *am* making it hard! And I meant to——'

'—anyway, I think you'd better come. Unless it would be too hard for you.'

There was a long silence. Then Henry, his forehead wet with sweat, his feet braced apart, his hands gripping the rail as if he were holding for his life, said, with a sudden quiet that she found a little disconcerting :—

'All right. I'll come. . . . Your aunt said a quarter past six, didn't she?'

'No, six.'

5

Madame Watt appropriated Henry the moment he entered her door on Saturday evening. She was, despite her talk of offhand summer informality, clad in an impressive costume with a great deal of lace and the shimmer of flowered silk.

At her elbow, Henry moved through the crowd in the front hall. He felt cool eyes on him. He stood very straight and stiff. He was pale. He bowed to the various girls and fellows—Mary, Martha, Herb, Elbow, and the rest, with reserve. It was, from moment to moment, a battle.

Nobody but Madame Watt would have thought of giving such a party. It was so expensive—the dinner for twenty-two, to begin with; then all the railway fares; a bus from the station in Chicago to the theatre and back. The theatre tickets alone came to thirty-three dollars (these were the less expensive days of the dollar and a half seat). Sunbury still, at the time, was inclined to look doubtfully on ostentation.

You felt, too, in the case of Madame, that she was likely to speak, at any moment rather—well, broadly. All that Paris experience, whatever it was, seemed to be hovering about the snapping black eyes and the indomitable mouth. You sensed in her none of the reserve of movement, of speech, of mind, that were implied in the feminine standards of Sunbury. Yet she was unquestionably a person. If she laughed louder than the ladies of Sunbury, she had more to say.

To-night she was a dominantly entertaining hostess. She talked of the theatre, in Paris, London and New York—of the Coquelins, Gallipaux, Bernhardt, of Irving and Terry and Willard and Grossmith. Some of these she had met. She knew Sothern, it appeared. Even the extremely worldly Elbow and Herb were impressed.

She had Henry at her right. Boldly placed him there. At his right was a girl from Omaha who was visiting the Smiths and who made several efforts to be pleasant to the pale gloomy youth with the little moustache and the distinctly interesting gray-blue eues.

By the time they were settled on the train Henry found himself grateful to the certainly strong, however coarse-fibred woman.

Efforts to identify her as she seemed now, with the woman of that hideous scene with the Senator brought only bewilderment. He had to give it up.

This woman was rapidly winning his confidence; even, in a curious sense, his sympathy.

At the farther end of the table the little Senator, all dignity and calm stilted sentences, made himself remotely agreeable to several girls at once.

At one side of the table sat Cicely, in lacy white with a wonderful little gauzy scarf about her shoulders. She looked at him only now and then, and just as she looked at the others. He wondered how she could smile so brightly.

Herb and Elbow made a great joke of fighting over her. Elbow had her at dinner; Herb on the train; Elbow again at the theatre.

Henry was fairly clinging to Madame by that time.

I think, among the confused thoughts and feelings that whirled ceaselessly around and around in his brain, the one that came up oftenest and stayed longest was a sense of stoical heroism. For Cicely's sake he must bear his anguish. For her he must be humble, kindly, patient. He had read, somewhere in his scattered acquaintance with books, that Abraham Lincoln had once been brought to the point of suicide through a disappointment in love. And to-night he thought much and deeply of Lincoln. He had already decided, during an emotionally turbulent two days, not to shoot himself.

During the first intermission the Senator stayed quietly in his seat.

When the curtain went down for the second time, he stroked his beard with a small, none-too-steady hand,

coughed in the suppressed way he had, and glanced once or twice at Madame.

The young men were, apparently all of them, moving out for a smoke in the lobby.

Henry, with a tingling sense of defiance, a little self-conscious about staying alone with the girls, followed them.

And after him, walking up the aisle with his odd strutting air of importance, came the Senator.

He gathered the young men together in the lobby; pulled at his twisted beard; said, 'It will give me pleasure to offer you young gentlemen a little refreshment;' and led the way out to a convenient bar. It was a large, high-panelled room. There were great mirrors; rows and rows of bottles and shiny glasses; alcoves with tables; and enormous oil paintings in still more enormous gilt frames and lighted by special fixtures built out from the wall. The one over the bar exhibited an undraped female figure reclining on a couch.

They stood, a jolly group, naming their drinks.

Henry, who had no taste for liquor, stood apart, pale, sober, struggling to exhibit a *savoir faire* that had no existence in his mercurial nature.

'I'll take ginger ale,' he said, in painful self-consciousness.

The Senator, his somewhat jaunty straw hat thrust back a little way off his forehead, took Scotch; drank it neat. It seemed to Henry incongruous when the prim little man tossed the liquor back against his palate with a long-practised flourish.

Back in his seat, between Madame and the girl from Omaha, Henry noted that the Senator had not returned with the others.

Madame turned and looked up the aisle.

The lights were dimmed. The curtain rose.

Cicely was in the row ahead, Herb on one side, Elbow on the other.

Elbow was calm, casual, humorous in a way, whispering phrases that had been found amusing by many girls.

Herb, the only man in what Henry still thought of as

a 'full dress suit,' had a way of turning his head and studying Cicely's hair and profile whenever she turned toward Elbow, that stirred Henry to anguish.

'He's rich,' thought Henry, twisting in his chair, clasping and unclasping his hands. 'He's rich. He can do everything for her. And he loves her. He couldn't look that way if he didn't.'

A comedian was singing and dancing on the stage. Cicely watched him, her eyes alight, her lips parted in a smile of sheer enjoyment.

'How can she!' he thought. 'How *can* she!' Then: 'I could do that. If I'd kept it up. If she'd seen me in *Iolanthe* maybe she'd care.'

The curtain fell on a glittering finale.

With a great chattering the party moved up the aisle. Cicely told her two escorts that she didn't know when she had enjoyed anything so much. She was merry about it. Care free as a child.

Henry stopped short in the foyer; standing aside, half behind a framed advertisement on an easel; his hands clenched in his coat pockets; white of face; biting his lip.

'I can't go with them!' he was thinking. 'It's too much. I can't! I can't trust myself. I'd say something. But what'll they think?

'She won't know. She won't care. She's happy—my suffering is nothing to her.' This was youthful bitterness, of course. But it met an immediate counter in the following thought, which, to any one who knew the often self-centred Henry would have been interesting. 'But that's the way it ought to be. She mustn't know how I suffer. It isn't her fault. A great love just comes to you. Nobody can help it. It's tragedy, of course. Even if I have to—to'—his lip was quivering now—'to shoot myself, I must leave a note telling her she wasn't to blame. Just that I loved her too much to live without her. But I haven't any money. I couldn't make her happy.'

His eyes, narrow points of fire, glanced this way and that. Almost furtively. Passion—a grown man's passion—was or seemed to him to be tearing him to pieces. And he hadn't a grown man's experience of life, the background

of discipline and self-control, that might have helped him weather the storm. All he could do was to wonder if he had spoken aloud or only thought these words. He didn't know. Somebody might have heard. The crowd was still pouring slowly out past him. It seemed to him incredible that all the world shouldn't know about it.

The others of the party were somewhere out on the street now. They were going to a restaurant; then, in their bus, to the twelve-fourteen, the last train for Sunbury until daylight.

What could he do if he didn't take that train? He might hide up forward, in the smoker. But there were a hundred chances that he would be seen. No, that wouldn't do. He must hurry after them.

But he flatly couldn't. Why, the tears were coming to his eyes. A little weakness, whenever he was deeply moved, for which he despised himself. There was no telling what he might do—cry like a girl, break out into an impossible torrent of words. A scene. Anywhere; on the street, in the restaurant.

No, however awkward, whatever the cost, he couldn't rejoin them, he couldn't look at Cicely and Elbow and Herb and the others.

He felt in his pocket. Not enough money, of course. He never had enough. He couldn't ever plan intelligently. Yet he was earning twelve dollars a week! . . . He had a dollar, and a little change. Perhaps it was enough. He could go to a cheap hotel. He had seen them advertised—fifty or seventy-five cents for the night. And then an early morning train for Sunbury.

He would be worse off then than ever, of course. The people who had talked, would have fresh material. Running away from the party! They might say that he had got drunk. Though in a way he would welcome that. It was a sort of way out.

The crowd was nearly gone. They would be closing the doors soon. Then he would have to go—somewhere.

A big woman was making her way inward against the human current. But Henry, though he saw her and knew in a dreamy way that it was Madame Watt, still couldn't,

for the moment, find place for her in his madly surging thoughts.

She passed him; looked into the darkened theatre; came back; stood before him.

Then came this brief conversation :—

'You haven't seen him, Henry?'

'No, I haven't.'

'Hm! Awkward—he took the pledge—he swore it—I am counting on you to help me.'

'Of course. Anything I——'

'Were you out with him between the acts?'

'Why—yes.'

'Did he drink anything then?'

'Yes. He took Scotch.'

'Oh, he did?'

'Yes'm.'

'It's all off, then. See here, Henry, will you look? The same place? Be very careful. People mustn't know. And I must count on you. There's nobody else. We'll manage it, somehow. We've got to keep him quiet and get him out home. I'll be at the restaurant. You can send word in to me—have a waiter say I'm wanted at the telephone. Do that. And . . .'

It is to be doubted if Henry heard more than half of this speech. She was still speaking when he shot out to the street, dodged back of the waiting groups by the kerb and disappeared among the night traffic of the street in the direction of a certain bar.

6

The Senator's cheeks and forehead and nose were shining redly above the little white beard, which, for itself, looked more than ever askew. The straw hat was far back on his head. He waved a limp hand toward the enormous, brightly lighted painting that hung over the bar.

Henry, a painfully set look on his face, sat opposite, across the alcove, leaned heavily on the table, and watched him.

The passion had gone out of him. He was wishing, in a state near despair, that he had listened more attentively to what Madame Watt had said. Something about getting word to her—at the restaurant. But how could he? If it had seemed disastrously difficult before, full of his own trouble, to face that merry party, it was now, with this really tragic problem on his hands, flatly impossible.

And there wasn't a soul in the world to help him. He must work it out alone. Even if he might get word to Madame, what could she do? She couldn't leave her party. And she couldn't bring this pitiable object in among those young people.

Henry's lips pressed together. The world looked to him just now a savage wilderness.

'Consider women, f'r instance!' The Senator's hand waved again toward the picture. It was surprising to Henry that he could speak with such distinctness. 'Consider women! They toil not, neither do they spin. Yet at the last, they bite like a serpent and sting like an adder.'

Henry held his watch under the table; glanced down. It was five minutes past twelve. For nearly an hour he had been sitting there, helpless, beating his brain for schemes that wouldn't present themselves. The twelve-fourteen was as good as gone, of course. Though it had not for a minute been possible. He thought vaguely, occasionally, of a hotel. But stronger and more persistent was the feeling that he ought to get him out home if he could.

'Women . . . !' The Senator drooped in his chair. Then looked up; braced himself; shouted, 'Here, boy! A li'l' more of the same!' When the glass was before him he drank, brightened a little, and resumed. 'Woman, my boy, is th' root—No, I will go farther! I will state that woman is th' root 'n' branch of all evil.'

Henry, with a muttered, 'Excuse me, Senator!' got out of the alcove and stepped outside the door. He stood on the door-step; took off his hat and pressed a hand to his forehead.

Across the street, near the side door of the hotel, stood an old-fashioned closed hack. The driver lay curled up

across his seat, asleep. The horses stood with drooping heads.

Henry gazed intently at the dingy vehicle. Slowly his eyes narrowed. He looked again at his watch. Then he moved deliberately across the way and woke the cabman.

'Hey!' he cried, as the man fumblingly put on his hat and blinked up the street and down. 'Hey, you! What'll you take to drive to Sunbury?'

'Sunbury? Oh, that's a long way. And it's pretty late at night.'

'I know all that! How much'll you take?'

The cabman pondered.

'How many?'

'Two.'

'Fifteen dollars.'

'Oh, say! That's twice too much! Why——'

'Fifteen dollars.'

'But——'

'Fifteen dollars.'

Henry swallowed. He felt very daring. He had heard of fellows and girls missing the late train and driving out. But the amount usually mentioned was ten dollars. However . . .

'All right. Drive across here.'

He bent over the Senator, who was talking, still on the one topic, to a small picture just above Henry's empty seat.

'We're going home now, Senator. You'd better come with me.'

'Going home? No, not there. Not there. Back to the Senate, yes. Tha's different. But not home. If you knew what I've——'

Henry led him out. But first the Senator, with some difficulty in the managing, paid his check. Henry would have paid it, but hadn't nearly enough. It had never occurred to him that a single individual could spend so large a sum on himself within the space of less, considerably less, than three hours.

The cabman and Henry together got him into the hack.

'They are pop—popularly known as the weaker sex.

All a ter'ble mistake, young man. They're stronger. Li'l' do you dream how stronger—how great—how more stronger they are. Curious about words. At times one commands them with ease. Other times they elude one. Words are more tricky—few suspect—but women allure us only to destroy us. Women. . . .'

Before the cab rolled across the Rush Street Bridge on its long journey to the northward he was asleep.

7

It was half-past two in the morning when a hack drawn by weary horses on whose flanks the later glistened, drew up at the porte cochère of the old Dexter Smith place in Sunbury.

The cabman lumbered down and opened the door. A youth, nervously wide awake, leaped out. Then followed this brief conversation.

'Help me carry him up, please.'

'You'd better pay me first. Fifteen dollars.'

'I'll do that afterward.'

'I'll take it now.'

'I tell you I'm going to get it——'

'You mean you haven't got it?'

'Not on me.'

'Well, look here——'

'Ssh! You'll wake the whole house up! You've simply got to wait until I get home. You needn't worry. I'm going to pay you.'

'You'd better. Say, he'd ought to have it on him.'

'We're not going into his pockets. Now you do as I tell you.'

Together they lifted him out.

Henry looked up at the door. Madame Watt, somebody, had left this outside light burning. Doubtless the thing to do was just to ring the bell.

He brushed the cabman aside. The Senator was such a little man, so pitifully slender and light! And Henry himself was supple and strong. He took the little old

gentleman up in his arms and carried him up the steps. And once again in the course of this strange night his eyes filled.

But not for himself this time. Henry's gift of insight, while it was now and for many years to come would be fitful, erratic, coming and going with his intensely varied moods, was none the less a real, at times a great, gift. And I think he glimpsed now, through the queer confusing mists of thought, something of the grotesque tragedy that runs, like a red and black thread, through the fabric of many human lives.

The Senator had been a famous man. Through nearly two decades, as even Henry dimly knew, he had stood out, a figure of continuous national importance. And now he was just—this. Here in Henry's arms; inert.

'Ring the bell, will you!' said Henry shortly.

The cabman moved.

There was a light step within. The lock turned. The door swung open, and Cicely stood there.

She was wrapped about in a wonderful soft garment of blue. She was pale. And her hair was all down, rippling about her shoulders and (when she stepped quickly back out of the cabman's vision) down her back below the waist.

Henry carried his burden in, and she quickly closed the door.

'Has anybody seen? Does anybody know?' she asked, in a whisper.

He leaned back against the wall.

'No. Nobody. But you——'

'I've been sitting up, watching. I was so afraid aunt might——'

'Then you know?'

'Know? Why—Tell me, do you think you can carry him to his room?'

'Me? Oh, easy! Why he doesn't weigh much of anything. Just look!'

'Then come. Quickly. Keep very quiet.'

Slowly, painstakingly, he followed her up the stairs and along the upper hall to an open door.

'Wait!' she whispered. 'I'll have to turn on the light.'

He laid the limp figure on the bed.

Outside, in the still night, the horses stirred and stamped. A voice—the cabman's—cried,—

'Whoa there, you! Whoa!'

Cicely turned with a start.

'Oh, why can't he keep still! . . . You—you'd better go. I don't know why you're so kind. Those others would never——'

'Please! You *do* know!'

This remark appeared to add to her distress. She made a quick little gesture.

'Oh, no, I don't mean—not that I want you to——'

'Not so loud! Quick! Please go!'

'But it's so terribly hard for you. I can't bear—I can't bear to think of your having to—people just mustn't know about it, that's all! We've got to do something. She mustn't—You see, I love you, and . . .'

Their eyes met.

A deep dominating voice came from the doorway.

'You had better go to your room, Cicely,' it said.

They turned like guilty children.

Cicely flushed, then quietly went.

Madame was a strange spectacle. She wore a quilted maroon robe, which she held clutched together at her throat. Most of the hair that was usually piled and coiled about her head had vanished; what little remained was surprisingly gray and was twisted up in front and over the ears in curl papers of the old-fashioned kind.

Henry lowered his gaze; it seemed indelicate to look at her. He discovered then that he was still wearing his hat, and took it off with a low, wholly nervous laugh that was as surprising to himself as it certainly was, for a moment, to Madame Watt, who surveyed him under knit brows before centring her attention on the unconscious figure on the bed.

'We owe you a great deal,' she said then. 'It was awkward enough. But it might have been a disaster. You've saved us from that.'

'Oh, it was nothing,' murmured Henry, blushing.

'Are you sure no one saw? You didn't take him to the station?'

'No. We drove straight out.'

'Hm! When you came did you ring our bell?'

'Me? Why, no. I was going to. But——'

'Yes?'

'She—your—Miss——'

'Do you mean Cicely?'

'Yes. She opened the door.'

Madame frowned again.

'But what on earth——'

Henry interrupted, looking up at her now.

'I'll tell you. I know. I can see it. And somebody's got to tell you.'

Madame looked mystified.

'She couldn't bear to have you know. She was afraid you——'

Madame raised her free hand. 'We won't go into that.'

'But we *must*. It was your temper she was——'

'We wont——'

'You *must* listen! Can't you see the dread she lives under—the fear that you'll forget yourself and people will know! And can't you see what it drives—him—to? I heard him talk when he was telling his real thoughts. I know.'

'Oh, you do!'

'Yes, I know. And I know this town. They're very conservative. They watch new people. They're watching you. Like cats. And they'll gossip. I know that too. I've suffered from it. Things that aren't so. But what do they care? They'd spoil your whole life—like that!—and go to the Country Club early to get the best dances. Oh, I know, I tell you. You've got to be careful. It isn't what I say, but you've *got* to! Or they'll find out, and they won't stop till they've hounded you out of town, and driven him to—this—for good, and broken her—your niece's—heart.'

He stopped, out of breath.

The fire that had flamed from his eyes died down, leaving them like gray ashes. Confusion smote him. He

shifted his feet; turned his hat round and round between his hands. What—*what*—had he been saying!

Then he heard her voice, saying only this:—

'In a way—in a way—you have a right. . . . God knows it won't . . . So much at stake. . . . Perhaps it had to be said . . .'

He felt that he had better retreat. Emotions were rising, and he was gulping them down. He knew now that he couldn't speak again; not a word.

She stood aside.

'It was very good of you,' she said.

But he rushed past her and down the stairs.

Humphrey, when he awoke in the morning, remembered dimly his temperamental young partner, a dishevelled, rather wild figure, bending over him, shaking him and saying, 'Gimme fifteen dollars! I'll explain to-morrow. Gosh, but I'm a wreck! You've no idea!'

And he remembered drawing to him the chair on which his clothes were piled and fumbling in various pockets for money.

8

When Henry awoke, at ten, he found himself alone in the rooms. The warm sunshine was streaming in, the university clock was booming out the hour. Then the mellow church bells set up their stately ringing.

He lay for a time drowsily listening. Then the bells brought recollections. Madame Watt, and Cicely, and often the Senator attended the First Presbyterian Church. Right across the alley, facing on Filbert Avenue. By merely turning his head, Henry could see the rear gable of the chapel and the windows of the Sunday-school room.

He sprang out of bed.

His blue serge coat was spotted. From the table in that bar-room, doubtless. He found a bottle of ammonia and sponged. It was also in need of a pressing, but he could do nothing about that now. He had to go to church.

No other course was thinkable. If only to sit where he could catch a glimpse now and then of her profile.

He heard a knock downstairs, but at first ignored it. No one would be coming here of a Sunday morning.

Finally he went down.

There, on the step, immaculately dressed, rather weary looking with dark areas under red eyes, stood Senator Watt.

'How do you do,' said he, with dignity.

'Won't you come in?' said Henry.

They mounted the stairs. The Senator sat stiffly on a small chair. Henry took the piano stool.

'I understand that you did me a very great service last night, Mr Calverly.'

'Oh, no,' Henry managed to say, in a mumbling voice, throwing out his hands. 'No, it wasn't really anything at all.'

'You will please tell me what it cost.'

'Oh—why—well, fifteen dollars.'

The Senator counted out the money.

'You have placed me greatly in your debt, Mr Calverly. I hope that I may some day repay you.'

'Oh, no! You see . . .'

Silence fell upon them.

The Senator rose to go.

'Drink,' he remarked then, 'is an unmitigated evil. Never surrender to it.'

'I really don't drink at all, Senator.'

'Good! Don't do it. Life is more complex than a young man of your age can perceive. At best it is a bitter struggle. Evil habits are a handicap. They aggravate every problem. Good day. We shall see you soon again at the house, I trust.'

Henry, moved, looked after him as he walked almost briskly away—an erect, precise little man.

Then Henry went to church.

Herb de Casselles ushered him to a seat. He could just see Cicely. He thought she looked very sad. Yet she sang brightly in the hymns. And after the benediction when Herb and Elbow and Dex Smith crowded about her in the

aisle, she smiled quite as usual, and made her quick, eager Frenchy gestures.

He brushed his hand across his eyes Had he been living through a dream—a tragic sort of dream?

He made his way, between pews, to a side door, and hurried out. He couldn't speak to a soul; not now. He walked blindly, very fast, down to Chestnut Avenue, over to Simpson Street, then up toward the stores and shops.

Humphrey had a way of working at the office Sundays. He decided to go there. There was the matter of the fifteen dollars. And Humphrey would expect him for their usual Sunday dinner at Stanley's.

He was passing Stanley's now. Next came Donovan's drug store. Next beyond that, Swanson's flower shop.

A carriage—a Victoria—rolled softly by on rubber tyres. Silver jingled on the harness of the two black horses. Two men in plum-coloured livery sat like wooden things on the box. On the rear seat were Madame Watt and Cicely.

The carriage drew up before Swanson's. Madame Watt got heavily out and went into the shop.

Cicely had turned. She was waving her hand.

Henry found his vision suddenly blurred. Then he was standing by the carriage, and Cicely was speaking, leaning over close to him so that the men couldn't hear.

'It was dreadful the way I let you go! I didn't even say good-night. And all the time I wanted you to know . . .'

He couldn't speak. He stared at her, lips compressed; temples pounding.

She seemed to be smiling faintly.

'We—we might say good-night now.'

He heard her say that.

She thought he shivered. Then he said huskily :—

'I—I've wanted to call you—to call you——'

'Yes?'

'—Cicely.'

There was a silence. She whispered, 'I think I've wanted you to.'

He had rested a hand on the plum upholstery beside her. In some way it touched hers; clasped it; gripped it feverishly.

The colour came rushing to his face. And to hers.

He saw, through a blinding mist, that there were tears in her eyes.

'Ci—Cicely, you don't, you can't mean—that you—too . . .'

'Please, Henry! Not here! Not now!'

They glanced up the street; and down.

'Come this afternoon,' she breathed.

'They'll be there.'

'Come early. Two o'clock. We'll take a walk.'

'Oh—Cicely!'

'Henry!'

Their hands were locked together until Madame came out.

The carriage rolled away.

Henry—it seemed to himself—reeled dizzily along Simpson Street to the stairway that you climbed to get to the *Gleaner* office.

And all along this street of his struggles, his failures, his one or two successes, his dreams, the dingy, two-story buildings laughed and danced and cheered about him, with him, for him—Hemple's meat-market, Berger's grocery, Swanson's, Donovan's, Schultz and Schwartz's barber shop, Stanley's, the Sunbury National Bank, the post-office—all reeled jubilantly with him in the ecstasy of young love!

IX

WHAT'S MONEY!

I

HENRY paused on the sill. The door he held open bore the legend, painted in black and white on a rectangle of tin :—

THE SUNBURY WEEKLY GLEANER
By Weaver and Calverly

'How late you going to stay, Hump?' he asked.

Humphrey raised his eyes, listlessly thrust his pencil back of his ear, and looked rather thoughtfully at the youth in the doorway; a dapper youth, in an obviously new 'Fedora' hat, a conspicuous cord of black silk hanging from his glasses, his little bamboo cane, caught by its crook in the angle of his elbow.

Humphrey's gaze wandered to the window; settled on the roof of the Sunbury National Bank opposite. He suppressed a sigh.

'I may want to talk with you, Hen. I've been figuring——'

The youth in the doorway shifted his position with a touch of impatience.

'See here, Hump, you know I can't make head or tail out of figures!'

Humphrey looked down at the desk.

'Anyway I'll see you at supper,' Henry added defensively.

'Mildred expects me down there for supper,' said Humphrey. The sigh came now. He pushed up the eye-shade and slowly rubbed his eyes. 'But I may not be able to get away. There are times, Hen, when you have to look figures in the face.'

The youth flushed at this, and replied, rather explosively :—

'A fellow has to do the sorta thing he *can* do, Hump!'

'Well—will you be at the rooms this evening?' Humphrey's eyes were again taking in the natty costume. And surveying him, Humphrey answered his own question; dryly. 'I imagine not.'

'Well—I was going over to the Watts' . . .'

There was a long silence.

Finally Henry let himself slowly out and closed the door.

Outside, on the landing, he paused again; but this time to button his coat and pull up the blue-bordered handkerchief in his breast pocket until a corner showed.

He looked too, by the fading light—it was mid-September, and the sun would be setting shortly, out over the prairie—at the tin legend on the door.

The sight seemed to reassure him somewhat. As did the other, similar tin legends that were tacked up between the treads of the long flight of stairs that led to Simpson Street, at each of which he turned to look.

Humphrey had before him a pile of canvas-bound account books, a spindle of unpaid bills, a little heap of business letters, and a pad covered with pencilled columns. He rested an elbow among the papers, turned his chair, and looked through the window down into the street.

A moment passed, then he saw Henry walking diagonally across toward Donovan's drug store.

For an ice-cream soda, of course; or one of those thick, 'frosted' fluids of chocolate or coffee flavour that he affected. And it was now within an hour of supper time.

Humphrey leaned forward. Yes, there he stood, on the kerb before Donovan's, looking, with a quick nervous jerking of the head, now up Simpson Street, now down. Yes, that was his hurry—the usual thing. Madame Watt made a point of driving down to meet the five-twenty-nine from town. Senator Watt always came out then. And usually Cicely Hamlin came along with her.

Humphrey sighed, rose, stood looking down at the bills and letters and canvas books; pressed a hand again against his eyes; wandered to the press-room door and looked, pursing his lips, knitting his brows, at the row of job presses, at the big cylinder press that extended nearly

across the rear end of the long room, at the row of type cases on their high stands, at imposing-stones on heavy tables. He sniffed the odour of ink, damp paper, and long respected dust that hung over the whole establishment. He smiled, moodily, as his eye rested on the gray and black roller towel that hung above the iron sink, recalling Bob Burdette's verses. He returned to the office, and stood for a few moments before the file of the *Gleaner* on the wall desk by the door, turning the pages of recent issues. From each number a story by Henry Calverly, 3rd, seemed to leap out at his eyes and his brain. *The Caliph of Simpson Street, Sinbad the Treasurer, A Kerbstone Barmecide, The Cauliflowers of the Caliph, The Printer and the Pearls, Ali Anderson and the Four Policemen*—the very titles singing aloud of the boy's extraordinary gift.

'And it's all we've got here,' mused Humphrey, moving back to his own desk. 'That mad child makes us, or we break. I've got to humour him, protect him. Can't even show him these bills. Like getting all your light and heat from a candle that may get blown out any minute.' And before dropping heavily into his chair, glancing at his watch, drawing his eye-shade down, and plunging again at the heavy problem of keeping a country weekly alive without sufficient advertising revenue, he added, aloud, with a wry, wrinkly smile that yet gave him a momentary whimsical attractiveness: 'That's the devil of it!'

There was a step on the stairs.

The door opened slowly. A red face appeared, under a tipped-down Derby hat; a face decorated with a bristling red moustache and a richly carmine nose.

Humphrey peered; then considered. It was Tim Niernan, one-time fire chief, now village constable.

'Young Calverly here?' asked the official in a husky voice.

Humphrey shook his head. His thoughts, momentarily disarranged, were darting this way and that.

'What is it, Tim? What do you want of him?'

Tim seemed embarrassed.

'Why——' he began, 'why——'

'Some trouble?'

'Why, you see Charlie Waterhouse's suing him.'

Humphrey tried to consider this.

'What for?'

'Well—libel. One o' them stories o' his. I liked 'em myself. My folks all say he's a great kid. But Charlie's pretty sore.'

'Suing for a lot, I suppose?'

'Why yes. Well—ten thousand.'

'Hm!'

'He lives with you, don't he—back of the Parmenter place?'

'Yes.' Humphrey's answer was short. At the moment he was not inclined to make Tim's task easy.

The constable went out. Humphrey watched him from the window. He passed Donovan's on the other side of the street and kept on toward the lake.

Humphrey returned to the wall file, and, standing there, read *Sinbad the Treasurer* through.

There was an extraordinarily fresh, naïve power in the story. Simpson Street was mentioned by name. There was but the one town treasurer, whether you called him 'Sinbad' or Waterhouse.

'He certainly did cut loose,' mused Humphrey. 'Charlie's got a case. Got his nerve, too.'

Then he dropped into his chair and sat, for a long time, very quiet, tapping out little tunes on his hollowed cheek with a pencil.

2

Henry turned away from Donovan's soda fountain, wiping froth from his moustache, and sauntered to the nearer of the two doors. His brows were knit in a slight frown that suggested anxiety. There was earnestness, intensity, in the usually pleasant gray-blue eyes as he peered now up the street, now down.

A low-hung Victoria, drawn by a glossy team in harness that glittered with silver, swung at a dignified pace around the corner of Filbert Avenue, two wooden men in plum-coloured livery on the box, two dignified figures on the rear seat, one middle-aged, large, formidable,

commanding, sitting erect and high, the other slighter and not commanding.

Instantly, at the sight, Henry's frown gave place to a nervously eager smile, returned, went again. When the carriage at length drew up before Berger's grocery, across the way, however, he had both frown and smile under reasonable control and was a presentable if deadly serious young man.

The footman leaped down and stood at attention. The formidable one stepped out and entered Berger's. And the slight, fresh-faced girl leaned out to welcome the youth who rushed across the street.

In Sunbury, in the nineties, a youth and a maiden could 'go together' without a thought of the future. The phrase implied frank pairing off, perhaps an occasionally shyly restrained sentimental passage, in general a monopoly of the other's spare time. An 'understanding,' on the other hand, was a distinctly transitive state, leading to engagement and marriage as soon as the youth was old enough or could earn a living or the opposition of parents could be overcome.

The relationship between Cicely and Henry had lately hovered delicately between the two states. If it seemed, after each timid advance, to recede from the 'understanding' point, that was because of the burdens and the heavy responsibility that instantly claimed their thoughts at the mere suggestion of engagement and marriage.

There were among the parents of Henry's boyhood friends, couples that had married at twenty or even younger, and on no greater income than Henry's rather doubtful twelve dollars a week. But that day had gone by. An 'understanding' meant now, at the very least, that you were saving for a diamond. You could hardly ask a nice girl to become engaged without one.

And marriage meant good clothes for parties, receptions and Sundays, and the street; it meant membership in the Country Club, a reasonably priced pew in church, a rented house, at least, preferably not in South Sunbury and distinctly not out on the prairie or too near the tracks, a certain amount invested in furniture, dishes and other

house fittings, and reasonable credit with the grocer and at the meat-market. You could hardly ask a nice girl to go in for less than that. You really couldn't afford to let her go in for less.

So they were marrying later now; six or eight or ten years later. And the girls were turning to older men. Here in Sunbury, Clemency Snow had married a man seven or eight years older whose younger brother had been among her playmates. Jane Bellman had married a shy little doctor of thirty-one or two. And Martha Caldwell, whom Henry had 'gone with' for two or three years, was permitting the rich, really old bachelor, James B. Merchant, Jr., to devote about all his time to her. He was thirty-eight if a day.

It was a disturbing condition for the town boys. Thoughts of it cast black shadows on Henry's undisciplined brain as he looked at the girl in the Victoria, felt, in the very air about them, her quick, bright smile, the delicately responsive liftings of her eyebrows, her marked desirability.

'Oh, Henry,' she was saying, 'I've just been hearing the most wonderful things about you! You can't imagine! At Mrs MacLouden's tea. There was a man there——'

Henry sniffed. A man at a tea! And talking to Cicely! Making up to her, doubtless.

'—a friend of Mr Merchant's, from New York. And what do you think? Mr Merchant showed him your stories. The ones that have come out. He's been keeping them. Isn't that remarkable? They read them aloud. And this man says that you are more promising than Richard Harding Davis was at your age. Henry—just *think*!'

But Henry was scowling. He was thinking with hot, growing concern, of the man. A rich old fellow, of course! One of the dangerous ones.

He leaned over the wheel.

'Cicely—you—you're expecting me to-night?'

'Oh! Why yes, Henry, of course I'd like to have you come.'

'But weren't you *expecting* me?'

'Why—yes, Henry.

'Of course'—stiffly—'if you'd rather I wouldn't come . .'

'Please, Henry! You mustn't. Not here on the street!'

He stood, flushing darkly, swallowing down the emotion that threatened to choke him.

She murmured:—

'You know I want you to come.'

This was unsatisfactory. Indeed he hardly heard it. He was full of his thoughts about her, about the older men, about those tremendous burdens that he couldn't even pretend to assume. And then came a mad recklessness.

'Oh, Cicely—this is awful—I just can't stand it! Why can't we have an understanding? Call it that? Stop all this uncertainty! I—I—I've just got to speak to your aunt——'

'Henry! Please! Don't say those things——'

'That's it! You won't let me say them.'

'Not here——'

'Oh, please, Cicely! Please! I know I'm not earning much, but I'll be twenty-one on the seventh of November and then I'll have more'n three thousand dollars. Please let me tell her that, Cicely. Oh, I know it wouldn't do to spend all the principal, but it would go a long way toward setting us up—you know—' his voice trembled, dropped even lower, as with awe—'get the things we'd need when we were—you know—well, married . . .'

He felt, as he poured out this mumbled torrent of words, that he was rushing to a painful failure. Cicely had drawn back. She looked bewildered, and tired. And he had fetched up in a black maze of despairing thoughts.

The footman must have heard part of it. He was standing very straight. And the coachman was staring out over the horses. He had probably heard too.

Then Madame Watt came sailing out of Berger's; fixed her hawk eyes on him with a curious interest.

He knew that he lifted his hat. He saw, or half saw, that Cicely tried to smile. She did bob her head in the bright quick way she had.

Then the Victoria rolled away, and he was standing, one foot in the street, the other on the kerb, gazing after them through a mist of something so near tears that he

was reduced to a painful struggle to gain even the appearance of self-control.

And then, for a quarter-hour, mood followed mood so fast that they almost maddened him.

He thought of old Hump, up there in the office, fighting out their common battle. Perhaps he ought to go back; do his best to understand the accounts. Figures always depressed him. No matter. He would go back. He would show Hump that he could at least be a friend. Yes, he could at least show that. Thing to do was to keep thinking of the other fellow. Forget yourself. That was the thing!

But what he did, first, was to cross over to Swanson's flower shop and sternly order violets. Paid cash for them.

'Miss Cicely Hamlin?' asked the Swanson girl.

'Yes,' growled Henry, 'for Miss Hamlin. Send them right over, please.'

Then he walked around the block; muttering aloud; starting; glancing about; muttering again. He could hardly go to Cicely's. Not this evening! Not when she had been willing to leave it like that.

He meant to go, of course. Too early. By seven-thirty or so. But he told himself he wouldn't do it. She would have to write him. Or lose him. He would wait in dignified silence.

The early September twilight was settling down on Sunbury. Lights came on, here and there. The dusk was a relief.

He had wrecked everything. It wasn't so much that he had proposed an understanding. In the circumstances she couldn't altogether object to that. It was risking the vital, final decision, of course. But that, sooner or later, would have to be risked. That was something a man had to face, and go through, and be a sport about. No, the trouble seemed to be that he had lost himself. He had made it awkward, impossible, for both of them. Through his impatience he had created an impossible situation. And in losing himself he had lost her, and lost her in the worst way imaginable. He had contrived to make an utterly ridiculous figure of himself, and, in a measure, of her. He had to set his teeth hard on that thought, and compress his lips.

He was on Simpson Street again. Yellow gas-light shone out of the windows of the *Gleaner* offices, over Hemple's. Old Hump was hard at it.

He went up there.

3

Humphrey was sitting there, chin on chest, long legs stretched under the desk. He didn't look up; only a slight start and a movement of one hand indicated that he heard.

Henry stood, confused, a thought alarmed, looking at him; moved aimlessly to his own desk and stirred papers about; came, finally, and sat on a corner of the exchange table, tapping his cane nervously against his knee.

'Aren't going to stay here all night, are you, Hump?' he asked, rather huskily.

Humphrey's hand moved again; he didn't speak.

'Hump! What's the matter? Anything happened?'

Still no answer.

'But you know we're picking up in advertising, Hump?'

'Not near enough.' This was a non-committal growl.

'And see the way our circulation's been——'

'Losing money on it. Can't carry it.'

'But—but, Hump——'

The senior partner waved his hand. His face was gray and grim, his voice restrained. He even smiled as he deliberately filled his pipe.

'It's bad, Hen. Very, very bad. I've tried to keep you from worrying, but you've got to know now. We paid a little over two thousand for this plant and the good will.

'Cheap enough, wasn't it?' cried Henry.

'If we'd really got her for that, yes. But look at the capital it takes. Building up. I had just a thousand more, a bond. Threw that in last month, you know.'

'Oh'—breathed Henry, fright in his eyes—'I forgot about that.'

'And you can't raise a cent.'

Henry tried to think this over. He started to speak;

swallowed; slipped off the table; stood there; lifted his cane and sighted along it out the window.

'I can—November seventh,' he finally remarked.

Humphrey blew a smoke-ring; followed it with his eyes.

'My boy, nations, worlds, constellations, may crash between now and November seventh.'

'I—I could tackle my uncle again,' murmured Henry, out of a despairing face.

There was at times an acid quality in Humphrey. Henry felt it in him now, as he said dryly :—

'As I recall your last transaction with your uncle, Hen, he told you finally that you couldn't have one cent of your principal before November seventh.'

'He—well, yes, he did say that.'

'Meant it, didn't he?'

'Y—yes. He meant it.'

'He's a business man, I believe.' Humphrey smoked for a moment; then added, with that same biting quality in his voice, 'And unless he's insane he would hardly put money into this business now. As it stands—or doesn't stand. And I presume he's not insane. No, we'll drop that subject.'

Henry felt Humphrey's eyes on him. Sombre cold eyes. And he fell again, in his misery, to sighting along his cane. It seemed to Henry that the world was reeling to disaster. His young, over keen imagination was painting ugly, inescapable pictures of a savage world in which all effort seemed to fail.

Between Humphrey and himself a gulf had opened. It was growing wider every minute. Nothing he could say would help; words were no good. He was afraid he might try to talk. It would be like him; floods of talk, meaningless, mere words, really mere nerves. He clamped his lips on that fear.

If I understand Henry, the thing that had brought him to despair—and he was in despair—was neither the sorry condition of the business, nor the trouble with Cicely. These had confused and saddened him. But the hopelessness had come after he saw Humphrey's face and eyes and

caught that cool note in his voice. To the day of his death Henry couldn't endure hostility in those close about him. He had to have friendly sympathy, an easy give and take of the spirit in which his *naïveté* would not be misunderstood. This sort of atmosphere provided, apparently, the only soil in which his faculties could take root and grow. Hostility in those he had been led to trust disarmed him, crushed him.

'Hump,' he ventured now, weakly, 'I think—maybe—you'd better show me those figures. I—I'll try to understand 'em. I will.'

Humphrey gave a little snort; brushed the idea away with a sweep of a long hand.

'No use!' he said brusquely. He rolled down the desk-top and locked it with a snap. 'Getting stale myself. Sleep on it. Not a thing you can do, Hen!' He knocked the ashes from his pipe, gloomily. Buttoned his vest. Suddenly he broke out with this:—

'You're a lucky brute, Hen!'

Henry started; glanced up; fumbled at his moustache.

'You're wondering why I said that. But, man, you're a genius—Yes, you are! I have to plug for it. But you've got the flare. You know well enough what's loaded all this circulation on us. Your stories! Not a thing else. You'll do more of 'em. You'll be famous.'

'Oh, no, Hump! You don't know how I've——'

'Yes, you'll be famous. I won't. It's a gift—fame, success. It's a sort of edge God—or something—puts on a man. A cutting edge. You've simply got it. I simply haven't.'

Henry pulled and pulled at his moustache.

'And you've got a girl—a lovely girl. She's mad about you—oh, yes she is! I know. I've seen her look at you.'

'But, Hump, you don't just know what——'

'She doesn't have to hide her feelings. Not seriously, not with a lying smile. And you don't have to hide yours. You haven't got this furtive rope around your neck, strangling the breath of decent morality out of your soul. Thank God you don't know what it means—that struggle. She'll be announcing her engagement one of these days.

There'll be presents and flowers. You'll get stirred up and write something a thousand times better than you know how to write. Money will come—oh, yes it will! It'll roll to you, Hen. For a time. Or at times. And you'll marry—a nice clean wedding. God, just to think of it is like the May winds off the lake!'

He threw out his long arms. Henry thought, perversely enough, that he looked like Lincoln.

'But the greatest thing of all is that you're twenty. Think of it! Twenty! . . . Hen, when I was twenty I put my life on a schedule for five years. They were up last month.

'I was to be flying at twenty-four. Think of it—flying! Through the air, man! Like a gull! At twenty-five I was to be famous and rich. A conqueror! I slaved for that. Worked days and nights and Sundays for that. Sweated for the Old Man there on the *Voice*; put up with his stupid little insults.'

He sprang up; got into his coat; looked at his watch.

'I'm late. Got to stop at the rooms too. Mildred'll be wondering. You can stay here if you like.'

But Henry clung to him. Around the back street they went. And Humphrey talked on.

'Well, I'm twenty-five! And where've I got? I love a woman. Hen, I hope you'll never be torn as I'm torn now. You think you've been through things. Why, you're an innocent babe. I've got a woman's name—and that's a woman's life, Hen!—in my hands. It's a muddle. Maybe there's tragedy in it. May never work out. Sometimes I feel as if we were going straight over a precipice, she and I. It goes dark. It suffocates me. . . . It's costing me everything. It'll take money—a lot of it—money I haven't got. If the paper goes, my last hopes go with it. If we can't turn that corner. Everything comes down bang. No use.'

Henry tried to say, 'Oh, I guess we'll turn our corner all right;' but if the words passed his lips at all it was only as a whisper.

They were a hundred feet from the alley back of Parmenter's. It was dark now, there in the shade of the

double row of maples. Humphrey stopped short; pressed his hands to his eyes; then looked at Henry.

'You coming to the rooms, too?' he asked.

Henry nodded.

'I don't know's I—I was forgetting, so many things—Oh well, come along. It hardly matters.'

At the alley entrance a man intercepted them; said, 'This is Henry Calverly, ain't it?' Struck a match and read an extraordinary mumble of words. He struck other matches, and read hurriedly on. Then he moved apologetically away, leaving Henry backed limply against a board fence.

Humphrey stood waiting, a tall shadow of a man. To him Henry turned, feeling curiously weak in the legs and gone at the stomach.

'What is it?' he asked, weakly, meekly. 'I couldn't understand. Did he ar—arrest me or something?'

'Charlie Waterhouse has sued you for libel. Ten thousand dollars. Come on. I can't wait.'

'But—but—but that's foolish. He can't——'

'That's how it is.' Humphrey was grim.

They walked in silence up the alley. Henry stood by while his partner unlocked the neat front door to the old barn, a white door, with one white step and an iron scraper. He could just make them out in the dusk. He wondered if he mightn't presently wake up and find it a dream. . . . Old Hump!

They stood in the shop. Humphrey had switched on one light; he looked now, his face deeply seamed, his eyes a little sunken, at the dim shadowy metal lathes, the huge reels of copper wire, the tool benches, the rows of wall boxes filled with machine parts, the small electric motors hanging by twisted strings or wires from the ceiling joists, the heavy steel wheels in frames, the great box kites and the spruce and silk planes, in sections, the gas engine, the water motor, the wheels, shafts, and belting overhead.

He bent his sombre eyes on Henry.

That youth, aching at heart, bruised of spirit, unaware of the figure he made, was too far gone to be further puzzled by the weary, mocking smile that flitted across Humphrey's face.

'Hump!' he cried out: 'What'll we *do!*'

'Do? Sleep over it. Raise some more money?'

'But how?'

Humphrey waved a hand at the machinery. 'All this. And my library upstairs. They've stood me more'n four thousand, altogether. Ought to fetch something.'

'But—but—ten thousand!' Henry whispered the amount with awe as well as misery.

'Oh, *that!* Your trouble! Why, you'll sleep over that, too, and to-morrow I suppose you'll talk to Harry Davis's father.' The senior Davis, Arthur P., was a Simpson Street lawyer. 'They'll sting you. But they don't expect any ten thousand.'

'But what I said is *true*! Charlie Waterhouse is a——'

'What's that got to do with it. You can't prove it. And we aren't strong enough to hire counsel and detectives and run him to earth. Doesn't look as if we had the barest breath of life in us. Charlie'll think of your uncle next, and attach your mother's estate.'

He said this with unusual roughness. Then he went upstairs; stamped around for a brief time; came hurrying down.

Henry, now, was sitting dejectedly on a work-bench.

'Hump—please!—you don't know how I feel. I——'

'And,' replied the senior partner, 'I don't care. I don't care how I feel, either. We either save the paper this week or we don't. That's what I care about right now.'

'I—I won't let you sell your things, Hump.' An unconvincing assertion, from the limp figure on the bench.

'You?' Humphrey stared at him with something near contempt—stared at the moustache and the cane. 'You? You won't let me? . . . For God's sake, *shut up*!'

With which he went out, slamming the door.

For a time Henry continued to sit there. Then he dragged himself upstairs, went to his bookcase and got the book entitled *Will Power and Self Mastery*.

He turned the pages until he hit upon these paragraphs:—

'Every machine, every cathedral, every great ship was a thought before it could become a fact. Build in your brain.

'Through the all-enveloping ether drifts the invisible electricity that is all life, all energy. Open yourself to it. Make yourself a conductor. Stupidity and fear are resistants; cast these out. Make your brain a dynamo and drive the world.'

This seemed a good idea.

4

Arthur P. Davis was just rising from the supper table when the door-bell rang. He answered it himself; found young Calverly there, in a state of haggard but vigorous youthful intensity. He contrived, after a slight initial difficulty, to draw out of the curiously verbose youth the essential facts. He considered the matter with a deliberation and caution that appeared irritating to the boy. But he had read and (in the bosom of his family) chuckled over *Sinbad the Treasurer*. He had wondered a little, though he didn't mention the fact to Henry, whether Charlie wouldn't sue. Charlie had a case.

When Henry left, clearly still in a confused condition, it was Mr Davis's impression that Henry had placed the matter in his hands as counsel and further had distinctly agreed to shut his head.

Henry apparently understood it differently. Or, more likely, he didn't understand at all. Henry was, at the moment, a storm centre with considerable emotional disturbance still to come. Any one who has followed Henry, who knows him at all, will understand that such disturbance within him led directly and always to action. Whatever he may have said to Mr Davis, he was helpless. He had to function in his own way. Probably Mr Davis's use in the situation was to stimulate Henry's already overactive brain. Hardly more.

Certainly it was hardly later than a quarter or twenty minutes past seven when Henry appeared at Charlie Waterhouse's place on Douglass Street.

The town treasurer was on the lawn, shifting his sprinkler by the light of the arc lamp on the corner and smoking his after-supper cigar.

The conversation took place across the picket fence, one of the few surviving in Sunbury at this time.

Henry said, fiercely :—

'I want to talk to you about that libel suit.'

'Can't talk to me, Henry. You'll have to see my lawyer.'

'Yay-ah, I know. I've got a lawyer too.'

'All right. Let 'em talk to each other.'

'You know you can't get any ten thousand dollars.'

'Can't talk about that.'

'Yes, you can. You gotta.'

'Oh, I've gotta, have I?'

'Yes, you bet you have. Some people seem to think you've got a case.'

'Guess there ain't much doubt about that.'

'Mebbe there ain't. Even if what I said was true.'

'Look here, Henry, I don't care to have this kind o' talk going on around here. You better go along.'

'Go along nothing! I'll say every word of it. And what's more, you'll listen. No, don't you go. You stand right there.'

Charlie, a stoutish man in an alpaca coat, with a florid countenance and a huge moustache, gave a moment's consideration to the blazing young crusader before him. The boy wasn't going to be any too easy to handle. He had no need to see him clearly to become aware of that fact.

Charlie shifted his cigar.

'Lemme put it this way. S'pose you could sting me. You'd never get ten thousand. But s'pose, after I get through talking, you decide to go ahead and push the case——'

'Push the case? Well, rather!'

'Wait a minute! All right, let's say you're going ahead and fight for part o' that ten thousand. What you think you could get. Then what'm I going to do?'

'Do you suppose I care what——'

'Oh, yes you do! Now listen! I want you to get this straight. You——'

'*You* want *me* to——'

'Keep still! Now here's——'

'Look here, I won't have you——'

'Yes, you will! Listen. If you fight, I'll fight. I'll go straight after you. I'll run you to earth. I'll hire detectives to shadow you. I *know* you ain't straight, and I'll show you up before the whole darn town. I'm right and I tell you right here I'm going to *prove* it! I'll put you in prison! I'll——'

During most of this speech Charlie was talking too. But in so low a tone that he could hardly miss what Henry was saying. He broke in now with a loud :—

'Shut up!'

Henry stopped really because he was out of breath. It gratified him to see that neighbours were appearing in their lighted windows. And a youthful chorus on a porch across the way was suddenly hushed.

'Came here to make a scene, did you? Well, I'll——'

'No, I didn't come here to make a scene. I came here to make you listen to reason and I'm going to do it.'

'Well, drop your voice a little, can't you! No sense in yelling our private affairs.'

'Sure I'll drop my voice. You're the one that started the yelling.'

'Well, I don't say you couldn't make it hard for any man in my position if you want to be nasty—fight that way.'

'You wait!'

'But what I'd like to know is—what I'd like to know . . . Where you goin' to get the money to hire all those detectives?'

'Where'm I going to get the money to pay you if you win the suit?'

Though Charlie came back with, 'Oh, I'll win the suit all right, all right!' this was clearly a facer. He added, pondering, 'I guess Munson'll manage to attach anything you've got.' But he was at sea. 'Fine dirty idea o' yours, hounding a decent man, with detectives.' And finally, 'Well, what do you want?'

'Listen! S'pose you did win. You'd never get ten thousand.'

'I'd get five.'

'No, you wouldn't. Why don't you act sensible and tell me what you'll take to stop it.'

'I'd have to think that over.'

'You tell me now or I'll bust this town open.'

'No good talking that way, Henry. Can you get any money?'

'Tell you for sure in twenty-four hours.'

'But it ain't the money. You've assailed my character. That's what you've done. Will you retract in print?'

'No, I won't. But if you'll come down to a decent price and promise to call off the boycott——'

'What boycott?'

'Advertising. You know. You do that, and I'll agree to leave you alone. Somebody else'll have to find you out, that's all. I've gotta help Hump Weaver pull the *Gleaner* out. I guess that's my job now.'

He said this last sadly. He had read stories of wonderful young St Georges who slew a dozen political dragons at a time. Who never compromised or gave hostages to fortune. But there was only one chance for the paper and for old Hump. That chance was here and now.

He was sorry he couldn't see Charlie Waterhouse's face.

'What'll you give?' asked that worthy, after thoughtfully chewing his cigar.

'A thousand.'

'Lord, no. Four thousand.'

'That's impossible.'

'Three, then.'

'No, I won't pay anything like three.'

'I wouldn't go a cent under two.'

'Well—two thousand then. All right. I'll let you know by to-morrow night.'

'You understand, Henry, it ain't the money. It's for the good o' the town I'm doing it. To keep peace, y' understand. That's why I'm doing it. Y'understand that, Henry.' He actually reached over the fence and hung to the boy's arm.

'We'd better shake hands on it,' said Henry.

'Sure! I'll stand by it, if you will.'

'I will. Good-bye, now.'

And Henry, somewhat confused regarding his ethical position, depressed at the thought that you couldn't rise altogether out of this hard world, that you had to live right in it, compromise with it, let yourself be soiled by it—Henry, his eyes down to beads, flushed about the temples, caught the eight-six to Chicago.

He rode out to the West Side on a cable-car. It is an interesting item to note in the rather zig-zag development of Henry's highly emotional nature that he never once weakened during that long ride. He was burning up, of course. It was like that wonderful week when he had written day and night, night and day, the Simpson Street stories. But it was, in a way, glorious. That ethereal electricity was flowing right through him. The Power was on him. He knew, not in his surface mind but in the deeper seat of all belief, in his feelings, that he couldn't be stopped or headed. Not to-night.

5

'You are not altogether clear, Henry. Let me understand this.'

The scene was Uncle Arthur's 'den.'

Henry had run the gauntlet of his cousins. Rich young cousins, brought up to respect their parents and think themselves poor. It was a proper home, with order, cleanliness, method shining out. He resented it. He resented them all.

Uncle Arthur was thin, and penetrating. His eyes bored at you. His nose was sharp, his brow furrowed. It seemed to Henry that he was always scowling a little.

His light sharp voice was going on, stating a disentangled, re-arranged version of Henry's extraordinary outbursts :—

'This man, the town treasurer, is suing you for libel, and you are advised that he has a case? But he will settle for two thousand dollars?'

'Yes. He will.'

'And you have come to me with the idea that I will pay over your mother's money for the purpose?'

'Well, I'll be twenty-one anyway in less'n two months. But that ain't—isn't—it exactly, not all of it. I've really got to have the whole three thousand.'

'Oh, you have?'

'Yes. It's like this. We bought the *Gleaner*, Hump Weaver and I. And we got it cheap, too. Two thousand —for plant, good will, the big press, everything.'

'Hmm!'

'Then I wrote those stories. They jumped our circulation way up. More'n we can afford. Queer about that. Because the paper'd been attacking Charlie Waterhouse, they got the advertiser's to boycott us.'

'Oh!'

'Now Charlie's promised me, if I pay him, to call off the boycott. It'll give us all the Simpson Street advertising. And Hump says we'll fail in a week if we don't get it.'

'Henry!' Uncle Arthur's voice rang out with unpleasant clarity. 'You got from me a thousand dollars of your mother's estate. You sank it in this paper. I let you have that thinking it would bring you to your senses. It has not brought you to your senses. That is evident. . . . Now I am going to tell you something extremely serious. I tell you this because I believe that you are not, for one thing, dishonest. I have discovered that when I gave you that sum and took your receipt I was not protected. You are a minor. You cannot, in law, release me from my obligation as your guardian. After you have come of age you could collect it again from me.'

'Oh, Uncle Arthur, I wouldn't do *that!*'

'I am sure you wouldn't. But you can readily see, now, that it is utterly impossible for me to make any further advances to you. Even if I were willing. And I am distinctly not willing.'

'But listen, Uncle Arthur! You've got to!'

The scowl of this narrow-faced man deepened.

'I don't care for impudence, Henry. We will not talk further about this.'

'But we must, Uncle Arthur! Don't you see, I've got to pay Charlie, and have Mr Davis get his receipt and the papers signed before they learn about you, or they'll

attach the estate. Why, Charlie might get all of it, and more too. They might just wreck me. I mustn't lose a minute.'

Uncle Arthur sat straight up at this. Henry thought he looked even more deeply annoyed. But he spoke, after a long moment, quite calmly.

'You are right there. That is a point. Putting it aside for a moment, what were you proposing to do with the other thousand dollars?'

Henry felt the sharp eyes focusing on him. He sprang up. His words came hotly.

'Because Hump has put in a thousand more'n I have now. He said to-night he'd have to sell his library and his —his own things. I can't let him do that. I *won't* let him. I've got to stand with him.' Henry choked up a little now. 'Hump's my friend, Uncle Arthur. He's steady and honest and——' He faltered momentarily; Uncle Arthur was peculiarly the sort of person you couldn't tell about Humphrey's love affair; he wouldn't be able then to see his strong points. . . . 'He edits the paper and gets the pay-roll and goes out after the ads. And he *hates* it! But he's a wonderful fighter. I won't desert him. I won't! I can't! . . . Uncle Arthur, why won't you come out and see our place and meet Hump and let him show you our books and how our circulation's jumped and . . .'

His voice trailed off because Uncle Arthur too had sprung to his feet and was pacing the room. Henry's arguments, his earnestness and young energy, something, was telling on him. Finally he turned and said, in that same quiet voice:—

'All right, Henry. I'll run out to-morrow and put this thing through for you. But——'

'Oh, no, Uncle Arthur! You mustn't do that! Not to-morrow! Charlie'd get wise. Or some of that gang. Everybody in town'd know you were there. No, *that* wouldn't do!'

Uncle Arthur took another turn about the room.

'Just what is it that you want, Henry?' he asked, in that same quiet voice.

'Why, let's see! You'd better give me two thousand in one cheque and one thousand in another. Mr Davis

can fix it so your cheque doesn't go to Charlie. I don't want to put it in the bank. Charlie's crowd'd get on. But I'll fix it. Mr Davis'll know.'

At the door Uncle Arthur looked severely at the dapper, excited youth on the steps.

'It may make a man of you. It will certainly throw you on your own resources. I shall have to trust you to release me formally from all responsibility after your birthday. And'—sharply—'understand, you are never to come to me for help. You have your chance. You have chosen your path.'

6

Eleven at night. The Country Club was bright; Henry passed it on the farther side of the street. He could hear music and laughter there. They choked him. With averted face he rushed by.

Henry entered at the gate before the old Dexter Smith mansion; then slipped off among the trees.

His throat was dry. He was giddy and hot about the head. He wondered, miserably, if he had a fever. Very likely.

There were lights here, too; downstairs.

Some one calling, perhaps—that friend of James B. Merchant's.

Henry gritted his teeth.

It was too late to call. Yet he had had to come, had been drawn irresistibly to the spot.

What mattered it after all, who might be calling. He told himself that his life was to be, hereafter, one of sorrow, of frustration. He must be dignified about it. He must make it a life worthy of his love and his great sacrifice.

The front door opened.

A man and a woman came down the steps. An elderly couple. He stood very still, behind a tree, while they walked past him.

A sigh of uncontrollable relief escaped him. It was something. Cicely had at least spared him a stab.

Lights went out in the front room. Lights came on upstairs.

Still he lingered.

Then, after a little, his nervous ears caught a sound that tingled through his body.

The front door opened.

And standing in the opening behind the screen door, silhouetted against the light, he saw a slim girl.

His temples were pounding. His throat went dry.

The girl came out. Paused. Called over her shoulder in a voice that to Henry was velvet and gold—'In a few minutes' —and then seated herself midway down the steps and leaned her head against the railing. He could see her only faintly now.

Henry moved forward, curiously dazed, tiptoeing over the turf, slipping from tree to tree. Drew near.

She lifted her head.

There was a breathless pause. Then, 'What is it?' she called. 'What is it? Who's there? . . . O—oh! Why, *Henry!* You frightened me . . . What is it? Why do you stand there like that. You aren't ill, Henry? . . . Where on earth have you been? I've waited and waited for you. I couldn't think what had happened, not having any word. . . . What *is* the matter, Henry? You act all tired out. Do sit down here.'

'No,'—the queer breathy voice, Henry knew, must be his own. He was thinking, wildly, of dead souls' standing at the Judgment Seat. He felt like that. . . . 'No, I can't sit down.'

'Henry! What *is* it?'

Henry stood mournfully staring at her. Finally in the manner of one who has committed a speech to memory, he said this:—

'Cicely, I asked you this afternoon if we couldn't have an "understanding." You know! It seemed fair to me, if—if—if you, well, cared—because I had three thousand dollars, and all that.'

She made a rather impatient little gesture. He saw her hands move; but pressed on:—

'Since then everything has changed. I have no right to ask you now.'

There was a long silence. As on other occasions, in moments of grave emergency, Henry had recourse to words.

'There was trouble at the office. I couldn't leave Hump

to carry all the burden alone. And I was being sued for libel. My stories . . . So I've had to make a very quick turn'—he had heard that term used by real business men; it sounded rather well, he felt; it had come to him on the train—'I've had to make a very quick turn—use every cent, or most every cent, of the money. Of course, without any money at all—while I might have some chance as a writer—still—well, I have no right to ask such a thing of you, and I—I withdraw it. I feel that I—I can't do less than that.'

Then, after another silence, Henry swayed, caught at the railing, sank miserably to the steps.

'It's all right,' he heard himself saying. 'I just thought—everything's been in such a wild rush—I didn't have my supper. I'll be all right . . .'

'Henry,' he heard her saying now, in what seemed to him, as he reflected on it later that night, at his room, in bed, an extraordinarily matter-of-fact voice; girls were complicated creatures—'Henry, you must be starved to death. You come right in with me.'

He followed her in through the great hall, the unlighted living-room, a dark passage where she found his hand and led him along, a huge place that must have been the kitchen, and then an unmistakable pantry.

'Stand here till I find the light,' she murmured.

It *was* the pantry.

She opened the ice-box, produced milk and cold meat. In a tin box was chocolate cake.

'I oughtn't to let you,' he said weakly. 'I knew you were angry to-day there——'

'But, Henry, they could *hear* you! Thomas and William. Don't you see——'

'That wasn't all,' he broke in excitedly. 'It was my asking for an understanding.'

She was bending over a drawer, rummaging for knife and fork.

'No, it wasn't that,' she said.

'I'd like to know what it was, then!'

'It was—oh, please, Henry, don't ever talk that way about money again.'

'But, Cicely, don't you see——'

She straightened up now, knife in one hand, fork in the other; looked directly at him; slowly shook her head.

'What,' she asked, 'has money to do with—with you and me?'

'But, Cicely, you don't mean——'

He saw the sudden sparkle in her dark eyes, the slow slight smile that parted her lips.

She turned away then.

'Oh,' she remarked, rather timidly, 'you'll want these,' and gave him the knife and fork.

He laid them on the table.

They stood for a little time without speaking; she fingering the fastener of the cake box, he pulling at his moustache.

Finally, very softly, she said this:—

'Of course, Henry, you know, we *would* really have to be very patient, and not say anything about it to people until—well, until we *could*, you know . . .'

And then, his trembling arm about her shoulders, his lips reverently brushing her forehead in their first kiss—until now the restraint of youth (which is quite as remarkable as its excesses) had kept them just short of any such sober admission of feeling—her cheek resting lightly against his coat, she said this:—

'I shouldn't have let myself be disturbed. I don't really care about Thomas and William. But what you said made me seem like that sort of girl. Henry, you—you hurt me a little.'

His eyes filled. He stood erect, looking out over the dark mass of her hair, looking down the long vista of the years. He compressed his lips.

'Of course,' he said bravely. 'We don't care about money We've got all our lives. I guess I can work. Prob'ly I'll write better for not having any. You know—it'll spur me. And I'll be working for you.'

He heard her whisper:—

'I'll be so *proud*, Henry.'

'What's money to us!' He seemed at last to be getting hold of this tremendous thought, to be approaching belief. He repeated it, with a ring in his voice: 'What's money to us!'

After all, what *is* money to Twenty?

X

LOVE LAUGHS

I

A SQUAT locomotive, bell ringing, dense clouds of black smoke pouring from the flaring smoke-stack, came rumbling and clanking in between the platforms and stopped just beyond the old red brick depot.

The crowd of ladies converged swiftly toward the steps of the four dingy yellow cars that made up, traditionally, the one-ten train. These ladies were bound for the shops, the matinées (it was a Wednesday, and October), the lectures and concerts of Chicago.

Henry Calverly, 3rd, avoided the press by swinging his slimly athletic person aboard the smoker. He stepped within and for a moment stood sniffing the thick blend of coal gases and poor tobacco, then turned back and made his way against the incoming current of men. Bad air on a train made him car-sick. He stood considering the matter, clinging to a sooty brake wheel, while the train started. Then he plunged at the door of the car next behind, in among an enormous number of dressed-up, chattering ladies. He wondered why they all talked at once; it was like a tea. He was afraid of them. Apparently they filled the car; he couldn't, from the door, see one empty seat. Well, nothing for it but to run the gauntlet. And not without a faintly stirring sense of conspicuousness that was at once pleasing and confusing he started down the aisle, clutching at seat-backs for support.

Near the farther end of the car there was one vacant half-seat. A girl occupied the other half. She was leaning forward, talking to the women in front. These latter, on close inspection—he had paused midway—proved to be Mrs B. L. Ames and her daughter, Mary.

This was awkward. He could hardly, as he felt, drop

into the seat just behind them. Besides, who was the girl in the other half of that seat? The hat was unfamiliar; yet something in the way it moved about came to him as ghosts come.

He weakly considered returning to the smoker; even turned; but a lady caught his sleeve. It was Mrs John W. MacLouden.

'I wanted to tell you how much we are enjoying your stories in the *Gleaner*,' she said. 'Mr MacLouden says they're worthy of Stevenson. His *New Arabian Nights* you know. Mr MacLouden met Stevenson once. In London.'

Henry blushed; mumbled; edged away.

Mary Ames looked up.

Her cool eyes rested on him. But she didn't bow, or smile. He wasn't sure that she even inclined her head.

His blush became a flush. He forgot Mrs MacLouden. It seemed now that he couldn't retreat. Not after that. He must face that girl. Walk coolly by. He couldn't take that seat, of course; but to walk deliberately by and on into the car behind would help a little. At least in his feelings; and these were what mattered. . . . Who *was* the girl under that unfamiliar hat? Some one the Ameses knew well, clearly.

He moved on, straight toward the enemy. Dignity, he felt, was the thing. Yes, you had to be dignified. Though it was a little hard to carry with the car lurching like this. He wished his face wouldn't burn so.

The girl beneath that hat raised her head, and exhibited the blue eyes and the pleasantly, even prettily freckled face of Martha Caldwell!

2

Henry stood, in a sense fascinated, staring down. He had put Martha out of his life for ever. But here she was! He had believed, now and then during the summer, that he hated her. To-day it was interesting—indeed, enough of the old emotional tension lingered within him to make it

momentarily, slightly thrilling—to discover that he liked her. He saw her now with an unexpected detachment. He even saw that she was prettier. The smile that was just fading when their eyes met had a touch of radiance in it.

Beside Martha, on the unoccupied half of the seat, lay her shopping bag.

In a preoccupied manner, as the smile died, she reached out to pick it up and make room. But the little action which had begun impersonally, brought up memories. Her hand stopped abruptly in air; her colour rose.

Then, as Henry, very red, lips compressed, was about to plunge on along the aisle, the hand came down on the bag.

She said, half audibly—it was a question :—

'Sit here?'

Henry was gripping the seat-corner just back of Mrs Ames's shoulder; a rigid shoulder. Mary had turned stiffly round. He couldn't stop his whirling mind long enough to decide anything. Why hadn't he gone straight by? What could they talk about? Unless they were to talk low, confidentially, Mary and her mother would hear most of it. And they couldn't talk confidentially. Not very well.

He took the seat.

What *could* they say?

But the surprising fact stood out that Martha was a nice girl, a likeable girl. Even if she had believed the stories about him. Even if . . . No, it hadn't seemed like Martha.

Henry was staring at Mrs Ames's tortoise-shell comb. Martha was looking out the window, tapping on the sill with a white-gloved hand.

A moment of the old sense of proprietorship over Martha came upon him.

'Silly,' he remarked, muttering it rather crossly, 'wearing white gloves into Chicago! Be black in ten minutes. Women-folks haven't got much sense.'

Martha gave this remark the silence it deserved. She dropped her eyes, studied the shopping bag. Then, very quietly, she said this :—

'Henry—it hasn't been very easy—but I *have* wanted to tell you about your stories . . .'

'What about 'em?' he asked, ungraciously enough. And he dug with his cane at the grimy green plush of the seat-back before him.

'Oh, they're so good, Henry! I didn't know—I didn't realise—just everybody's talking about them! *Everybody!* You've no idea! It's been splendid of you to—you know, to answer people that way.'

I don't think Martha meant to touch on the one most difficult topic. They both reddened again.

After a longer pause, she tried it again.

'I just *love* reading them myself. And I wish you could hear the things Jim—Mr Merchant—says. . . .'

She was actually dragging him in!

'. . . . He's really a judge. You've no idea, Henry!' He met Kipling at a tea in New York. He knows lots of people like—you know, editors and publishers, people like that. And he crossed the ocean once with Richard Harding Davis. He says you're doing a very remarkable thing . . . original note. . . . Sunbury is going to be proud of you. He wouldn't let anything—you know, personal—influence his judgment. He's very fair-minded.'

Henry dug and dug at the plush.

She was pulling at her left glove.

What on earth! . . .

She had it off.

'I want you to know, Henry. Such a wonderful thing has happened to me. See!'

On her third finger glittered a diamond in a circlet of gold.

'He wanted to give me a cluster, Henry. I wouldn't let him. I just didn't want him to be too extravagant. I love this stone. I picked it out myself. At Welding's. And then he wished it on. And, Henry, I'm so happy! I can't bear to think that you and I—anybody—you know . . .'

Henry was critically, moodily, appraising the diamond.

'Can't we be friends, Henry?'

'Sure we can! Of course!'

'I just can't tell you how wonderful it is. I want everybody else to be happy.'

'I'm happy!' he announced, explosively, between set teeth.

She thought this over.

'I've heard a little talk, of course. I've been interested, too. Yes, I have! Cicely's a perfectly dandy girl. And she's—you know, *that* way. Knows so much about books and things. I didn't realise—that you were—you know, really—well, engaged?'

There was a long pause. Henry dug and dug with his stick.

Finally, eyes wandering a little but mouth still set, he said huskily :—

'Yes, we're engaged.'

'What was that, Henry?'

'I said, "Yes, we're engaged."'

'O—o—oh, Henry! I'm so glad!'

'Don't say anything about it, Martha.'

'Oh, of *course* not! . . . You've no idea how nice people are being to me. They're giving me a party to-night, down on the South Side. We're coming back to-morrow.'

Mr Merchant met her in the Chicago depot. Henry had excused himself before Mrs Ames and Mary got up. He would have hurried off into the grimy city, but the crowd held him back. Martha saw him and dragged the rich and important man of her choice toward him.

Henry thought him very old, and not particularly good-looking. He was a stocky, sandy-complexioned man; dressed now, as always, in brown, even to a brown hat. He looked strong enough—Henry knew that he played polo, and that sort of thing—but gossip put him at thirty-eight. He certainly couldn't be under thirty-five. Henry wondered how Martha could . . .

Then he found himself taking the man's hand and listening to more of the familiar praise. But on this occasion it had, he felt, a condescension, a touch of patronage, that irritated him.

'I'd like to talk with you, Calverly. There's a chance that—I'll tell you! I may be able to arrange it this

evening. They're not letting me come to the party. Got to do something. I'll try it. Come around to my place between eight and half-past, and I'll explain more fully. There's a classmate of mine in town that can help us, maybe. You'll do that? Good! I'll expect you.'

He was gone.

Slowly, moodily, Henry wandered through the station and up the long stairway to the street.

He felt deeply uncomfortable. It wasn't this Mr Merchant, though he wished he had known how to show his resentment of the man's offhand manner. But he hadn't known; he wouldn't again; before age and experience he was helpless. No, his trouble lay deeper. He shouldn't have told Martha that he was engaged. Why had he done such a thing? What on earth had he meant by it? It was a rather dreadful break.

He paused on the Wells Street bridge; hung over the dirty wooden railing; watched a tug come through the opaque, sluggish water, pouring out its inevitable black smoke, a great rolling cloud of it, that set him coughing. He perversely welcomed it.

Cicely expected him in the evening. He would have to drop in on his way to Mr Merchant's. Could he tell her what he had done? Dared he tell her?

Martha and the Ameses would be gone overnight. That was something. And people didn't get up early after parties. At least, girls didn't. It would be afternoon before they would reappear in Sunbury. Say twenty-four hours. But immediately after that, certainly by evening, all Sunbury would have the news that the popular Cicely Hamlin was engaged. To young Henry Calverly. The telephone would ring. Congratulations would be pouring in.

He stared fixedly at the water. He wondered what made him do these things, lose control of his tongue. It wasn't his first offence; nor, surely, his last. An unnerving suggestion, that last! He asked himself how bad a man had to feel before jumping down there and ending it all. It happened often enough. You saw it in the papers.

3

Welding's jewellery store occupied the best corner on the proper side of State Street. In its long series of show windows, resting on velvet of appropriate colours, backed by mirrors, were bracelets, lockets, rings, necklaces, 'dog-collars' of matched pearls, diamond tiaras, watches, chests of silverware, silver bowls, cups and ornaments, articles in cut glass, statuettes of ebony, bronze and jade, and here and there, in careless little heaps, scattered handfuls of unmounted gems—rubies, emeralds, yellow, white and blue diamonds, and rich-coloured semi-precious stones.

But all this without over-emphasis. There were no built-up, glittering pyramids, no placards, no price-tags even. There was instead, despite the luxury of the display, a restraint; as if it were more a concession to the traditions of sound shop-keeping than an appeal for custom. For Welding's was known, had been known through a long generation, from Pittsburg to Omaha. Welding's, like the Art Institute, Hooley's Theatre, Devoe's candy store, Field's buses, Central Music Hall, was a Chicago institution, playing its inevitable part at every well-arranged wedding as in every properly equipped dining-room. You couldn't give any one you really cared about a present of jewellery in other than a Welding box. Not if you were doing the thing right! Oh, you *could*, perhaps. . . .

And Welding's, from the top-booted, top-hatted doorman (such were not common in Chicago then) to the least of the immaculately clad salesmen, was profoundly, calmly, overpoweringly aware of its position.

Before the section of the window that was devoted to rings stood Henry.

About him pressed the throng of early-afternoon shoppers —sharp-faced women, brisk business men, pretty girls in pretty clothes, messenger boys, loiterers and the considerable element of foreign-appearing, rather shabby men and women, boys and girls that were always an item in the Chicago scene. Out in the wide street the traffic, a

tangle of it (this was before the days of intelligent traffic regulation anywhere in America) rolled and rattled and thundered by—carriages, hacks, delivery wagons, two-horse and three-horse trucks, and trains of cable-cars, each with its flat wheel or two that pounded rhythmically as it rolled. And out of the traffic—out of the huge, hive-like stores and office-buildings, out of the very air as breezes blew over from other, equally busy streets, came a noise that was a blend of noises, a steady roar, the nervous hum of the city.

But of all this Henry saw, heard, nothing; merely pulled at his moustache and tapped his cane against his knee.

A wanly pretty girl, with short yellow hair curled kinkily against her head under a sombrero hat, loitered toward him, close to the window; paused at his side, brushing his elbow; glanced furtively up under her hat brim; smiled mechanically, showing gold teeth; moved around him and lingered on the other side; spoke in a low tone; finally, with a glance toward the fat policeman who stood, in faded blue, out in the thick of things by the car tracks, drifted on and away.

Henry had neither seen nor heard her.

Brows knit, lips compressed, eyes nervously intent, he marched resolutely into Welding's.

'Look at some rings!' he said, to a distrait salesman.

He indicated, sternly, a solitaire that looked, he thought, about like Martha's.

'How much is that?'

'That? Not a bad stone. Let me see . . . Oh, three hundred dollars.'

Henry, huskily, in a dazed hush of the spirit, repeated the words:—

'Three—hundred—dollars!'

The salesman tapped with manicured fingers on the showcase.

'Have you—have you—have you . . .'

The salesman raised his eyebrows.

' . . . any others?'

'Oh, yes, we have others.' He drew out a tray from the

wall behind him. 'I can show fairly good stones as low as sixty or eighty dollars. Here's one that's really very good at a hundred.'

There was a long silence. The glistening finger nails fell to tapping again.

'This one, you say is—one hundred?'

'One hundred.'

Another silence. Then:—

'Thank you. I—I was just sorta looking around.'

The salesman began replacing the trays.

Henry moved away; slowly, irresolutely, at first; then, as he passed out the door, with increasing speed. At the corner of Randolph he was racing along. He caught the two-fourteen for Sunbury by chasing it the length of the platform. Henry could do the hundred yards under twelve seconds at any time with all his clothes on. He could do it under eleven on a track.

By a quarter to three he was walking swiftly, with dignity, up Simpson Street. He turned in at the doorway beside Hemple's meat-market and ran up the long stairway to the offices above.

Humphrey strolled in from the composing room.

'Seen those people already, Hen?'

'I—you see—well, no. I'm going right back in. On the three-eight.'

'Going back? But——'

'It's this way, Hump. I—it'll seem sorta sudden, I know—you see, I want to get an engagement ring. There's one that would do all right, I think, for—well, a hundred dollars—and I was wondering . . .'

Humphrey stared at him; grinned.

'So you've gone and done it! You don't say! You are a bit rapid, Henry. The lady must have been on the train.'

'No—not quite—you see . . .'

'Got to be done right now, eh? All in a rush?'

'Well, Hump . . .'

'Wait a minute! Let me collect my scattered faculties. If you've got to this point it's no good trying to reason with you——'

'But, Hump, I'll be reasonable——'

'Yes, I know. Now listen to me! This appears to come under the general head of emergencies. We're not quite in such bad shape as we were a month back. There's a little advertising revenue coming in. An——'

'Yes, I thought—'

'And you've certainly sunk enough in this old property—'

'No more than you, Hump——'

'Just wait, will you! I don't see but what we've got to stand back of you. Perhaps we'd better enter it as a loan from the business to you until I can think up a better excuse. Or no, I'll tell you—call it a salary advance. Well, something! I'll work it out. Never you mind now. And if you're going to stop at the bank and catch the three-eight you'll have to step along.'

It would have interested a student of psychophysics, I think, to slip a clinical thermometer in under Henry's tongue as he sat, erect, staring, with nervously twitching hands and feet, on the three-eight train.

4

To Cicely's house Henry hurried after bolting a supper at Stanley's restaurant and managing to evade Humphrey's amused questions when he heard them.

It was early, barely half-past seven. The Watt household had dinner (not supper) at seven. They would hardly be through. He couldn't help that. He had waited as long as he could.

He rang the bell. The butler showed him in. He sat on the piano stool in the spacious, high-ceiled parlour, where he had waited so often before.

To-night it looked like a strange room.

He told himself that it was absurd to feel so nervous. He and Cicely understood each other well enough. She cared for him. She had said so, more than once.

Of course, the little matter of facing Madame Watt . . . though, after all, what could she do?

He tried to control the tingling of his nerves.

'I must relax,' he thought.

With this object he moved over to the heavily upholstered sofa and settled himself on it; stretched out his legs; thrust his hands into his pockets.

But there was an extraordinary pressure in his temples; a pounding.

He snatched a hand from one pocket and felt hurriedly in another to see if the precious little box was there; the box with the magical name embossed on the cover, 'Welding's.'

He reflected, exultantly, 'I never bought anything there before.'

Then: 'She's a long time. They must be at the table still.' He sat up; listened. But the dining-room in the Dexter Smith place was far back behind the 'back parlour.' The walls were thick. There were heavy hangings and vast areas of soft carpet. You couldn't hear. 'Gee!' his thoughts raced on, 'think of owning all this! Wonder how people ever get so much money. Wonder how it would seem.'

He caught himself twisting his neck nervously within his collar. And his hands were clenched; his toes, even, were drawn up tightly in his shoes.

'Gotta relax,' he told himself again.

Then he felt for the little box. This time he transferred it to a trousers pocket; held it tight in his hand there.

A door opened and closed. There was a distant rustling.

Henry, paler, sprang to his feet.

'I must be cool,' he thought. 'Think before I speak. Everything depends on my steadiness now.'

But the step was not Cicely's. She was slim and light. This was a solid tread.

He gripped the little box more tightly. He was meeting with a curious difficulty in breathing.

Then, in the doorway, appeared the large person, the hooked nose, the determined mouth, the piercing, hawk-like eyes of Madame Watt.

'How d'do, Henry,' she said, in her deep voice. 'Sit down. I want to talk to you. About Cicely. I'm going to tell you frankly—I like you, Henry; I believe you're

going to amount to something one of these days—but I had no idea—now I want you to take this in the spirit I say it in—I had no idea things were going along so fast between Cicely and you. I've trusted you. I've let you two play together all you liked. And I won't say I'd stand in the way, a few years from now——'

'A few years! . . .'

'Now, Henry, I'm not going to have you getting all stirred up. Let's admit that you're fond of Cicely. You are, aren't you? Yes? Well, now we'll try to look at it sensibly. How old are you?'

'I'm twenty, but——'

'When will you be twenty-one?'

'Next month. You see——'

'Now tell me—try to think this out clearly—how on earth could you expect to take care of a girl who's been brought up as Cicely has. Even if she were old enough to know her own mind, which I can't believe she is.'

'Oh, but she does!'

'Fudge, Henry! She couldn't. What experience has she had? Never mind that, though. Tell me, what is your income now. You'll admit I have a right to ask.'

'Twelve a week, but——'

'And what prospects have you? Be practical now! How far do you expect to rise on the *Gleaner*?'

'Not very high, but our circulation——'

'What earthly difference can a little more or less circulation make when it's a country weekly! No, Henry, believe me, I have a great deal of confidence in you—I mean that you'll keep on growing up and forming character—but this sort of thing can not—simply can not—go on now. Why, Henry, you haven't even begun your man's life yet! Very likely you'll write. It may be that you're a genius. But that makes it all the more a problem. Can't you see——'

'Yes, of course, but——'

'No, listen to me! I asked Cicely to-day why you were coming so often. I wasn't at all satisfied with her answers to my questions. And when I forced her to admit that she has been as good as engaged to you——'

'But we *aren't* engaged! It's only an understanding.'

'Understanding! Pah! Don't excite me, Henry. I want to straighten this out just as pleasantly as I can. I *am* fond of you, Henry. But I never dreamed—— Tell me, you and that young Weaver own the *Gleaner*, I think.'

'Yes'm we own it. But——'

'Just what does that mean? That you have paid money—actual money—for it?'

'Yes'm. It's cost us about four thousand.'

'Four thousand! Hmm!'

'And then Charlie Waterhouse—he's town treasurer—he sued me for libel—ten thousand dollars'—Henry seemed a thought proud of this—'and I had to give him two thousand to settle. It was something in one of my stories—the one called *Sinbad the Treasurer*. Mr Davis—he's my lawyer—he said Charlie had a case, but——'

'Wait a minute, Henry! Where did you get that money. It's—let me see—about four thousand dollars—your share—'

'Yes'm four thousand. It was my mother's. She left it to me. But——'

'I see. Your mother's estate. How much is left of it—outside what you lost in this suit and the two thousand you've invested in the paper.

'Nothing. But——'

'Nothing! Now, Henry—no, don't speak! I want you to listen to me a few minutes longer. And I want you to take seriously to heart what I'm going to say. First, about this paper, the *Gleaner*. It's a serious question whether you'll ever get your two thousand dollars back. If you ever *have* to sell out you won't get anything like it. If you were older, and if you were by nature a business man—which you aren't!—you might manage, by the hardest kind of work to build it up to where you could get twenty or thirty dollars a week out of it instead of twelve. But you'll never do it. You aren't fitted for it. You're another sort of boy, by nature. And I'm sorry to say I firmly believe this money, or the most of it is certain to go after the other two thousand, that Mr Charlie Waterhouse got. But even considering that you boys *could* make the

paper pay for itself, Cicely couldn't be the wife of a struggling little country editor. I wouldn't listen to that for a minute! No, my advice to you, Henry, is to take your losses as philosophically as you can, call it experience, and go to work as a writer. It'll take you years——'

'*Years!* But——'

'Yes, to establish yourself. A success in a country town isn't a New York success. Remember that. No, it's a long road you're going to travel. After you've got somewhere, when you've become a man, when you've found yourself, with some real prospects—it isn't that I'd expect you to be rich, Henry, but I'd *have* to be assured that you were a going concern—why, then you might come to me again. But not now. I want you to go now——'

'Without seeing Cicely?'

'Certainly. Above all things. I want you to go, and promise that you won't try to see her. To-morrow she goes away for a long visit.'

'For—a—long . . . But she'd see other men, and—Oh! . . .'

'Exactly. I mean that she shall. Best way in the world to find out whether you two are calves or lovers. One way or the other, we'll prove it. And now you must go! Remember you have my best wishes. I hope you'll find the road one of these days and make a go of it.'

A moment more and the front door had closed on him.

He stood before the house, staring up through the maple leaves at the starry sky, struggling, for the moment vainly, toward sanity. It was like the end of the world. It was unthinkable. It was awful.

But after waiting a while he went to Mr Merchant's. There was nothing else to do.

5

Mr Merchant himself opened the door to Henry. He lived in one of the earliest of the apartment buildings that later were to work a deep change in the home life of Sunbury.

'How are you, Calverly!' he said, in his offhand, superior

way. Then in a lower and distinctly less superior tone, almost friendly indeed, he added, 'Got a bit of a surprise for you. Come in.'

The living-room was lighted by a single standing lamp with a red shade. Beneath it, curled up like a boy in a cretonne-covered wing chair, his shock of faded yellow hair mussed where his fingers had been, his heavy faded yellow moustache bushing out under a straight nose and pale cheeks, his old gray suit sadly wrinkled, sat a stranger reading from a handful of newspaper clippings.

Henry paused in the door. The man looked up, so quickly that Henry started, and fixed on him eyes that while they were a rather pale blue yet had an uncanny fire in them.

The man frowned as he cried, gruffly:—

'Oh, come in! Needn't be afraid of me!' And coolly read on.

Henry stepped just inside the door. Turned mutely to his host. What a queer man! Had he had it within him at the moment to resent anything, he would have stiffened. But he was crushed to begin with.

The newspaper clippings had a faintly familiar look. From across the room he thought it the type and paper of the *Gleaner*. His stories, doubtless. Mr Merchant was making the man read them. Well, what of it! What was the good, if they made him so cross.

'Calverly, if Mr Galbraith would stop reading for a minute—'

'I won't. Don't interrupt me!'

'—I would introduce him.'

Galbraith! The name brought colour to Henry's cheek. Not . . . It couldn't be! . . . .

'But whether you care to know it or not, this is Mr Calverly, the author of——'

'So I gathered. Keep still!'

Then the extraordinary gentleman, muttering angrily, gathered up the clippings and went abruptly off down the hall, apparently to one of the bedrooms.

'That—that isn't *the* Mr Galbraith?' asked Henry, in voice tinged with awe.

'That's who it is. The creator of the modern magazine. We'll have to wait till he's finished now, or he'll eat us alive.'

Henry tried to think. This sputtery little man! He was famous, and he wasn't even dignified. Henry would have expected a frock coat; or at least a manner of business-like calm.

Mr Merchant was talking, good-humoredly. Henry heard part of it. He even answered questions now and then. But all the time he was trying—trying—to think. He thrust his hands into his pockets. One hand closed on the little box. He winced; closed his eyes; fought desperately for some sort of a mental footing.

'Calverly! What's the matter with you? You look ill. Let me get you a drink.'

And Henry heard his own voice saying weakly :—

'Oh, no, thank you. I never take anything. I just don't feel very well. It's been a—a hard day.'

'Lie down on the sofa then. Rest a little while. For I'm afraid you've got a bit of excitement coming.'

Henry did this.

Shortly the great little Mr Galbraith returned. He came straight to Henry; stood over him; glared—angrily, Henry thought, with a fluttering of his wits—down at him.

It seemed to Henry that it would be politer to sit up. He did this, but the editor caught his shoulder and pushed him down again.

'No,' he cried, 'stay as you were. If you're tired, rest! Nothing so important—nothing! If I had learned that one small lesson twenty years ago, I'd be sole owner of my business to-day. Rest—that's the thing! And the stomach. Two-thirds of our troubles are swallowed down our throats. What do you eat?'

'I—I don't know's I——'

'For breakfast, say! What did you eat this morning for breakfast?'

'Well, I had an orange, and some oatmeal, and——'

'Wait! Stop right there! Wrong at the beginning. I don't doubt you had cream on the oatmeal?'

'Well—milk, sorta.'

'Exactly! Orange and milk! Now really—think that over—orange and milk! Isn't that asking a lot of your stomach, right at the beginning of the day?'

Mr Merchant broke in here.

'Galbraith, for heaven's sake! Don't bulldoze him.'

'But this is important. It's health! We've got to look out for that. Right from the start! Here, Calverly—how old are you?'

'I'm—well—most—twenty-one.'

'Most twenty-one! And you have to lie down before nine o'clock! Good God, boy, don't you see——'

'Oh, come, Galbraith!'

'Well, I'll put it this way:—Here's a young man that can work magic. Magic!' He waved the bundle of clippings. 'Nothing like it since Kipling and Stevenson! First thing's to take care of him, isn't it?'

Mr Merchant winked at the staring, crushed youth on the sofa.

'Then you like the stories, Galbraith?'

'Like 'em! Of course I like 'em. What do you think I'm talking about? . . . Like 'em! Hmpf! Tell you what I'm going to do. A new thing in American publishing. But they're a new kind of stories. I'm going to reprint 'em, as they stand, in *Galbraith's*. What do you think o' that? A bit original, eh? I'll advertise that they've been printed before. Play it up. Tell how I found 'em. Put over my new author.' He shook his finger again at the author in question. 'Understand, I'm going to pay you just as if you'd submitted the script to me. That's how I work. Cut out all the old editorial nonsense. Red tape. If I like a thing I print it. I edit *Galbraith's* to suit myself. I succeed because there are a million and a half others like me. And I print the best. I'm the editor of *Galbraith's* Oh, I keep a few desk men down there at the office. For the details. One of 'em thought he was the editor. Little short fellow. I stood him a month. Had to go to England. The day I landed I walked in on him and said, "Frank, pack up! Get out! Take a month's pay. I'm the editor."'

He snorted at the memory, and paced down the room,

waving the clippings. Henry sat up, following him with anxious eyes.

When the extraordinary little man came back he said, shortly: 'All tyrants have short legs.' And walked off again.

'Who's Calverly?' he asked, the next time around. 'It's on the paper here—"Weaver and Calverly"? Father? Uncle?'

'No,' Henry managed to reply, 'it's—it's me.'

'You? Good heavens! We must stop that.' He tapped Henry's shoulder. 'Don't be a desk man! You're an artist! You don't seem to understand what we're getting at. Man, I'm going to make you! You're going to be famous in a year.'

He stopped short; took another swing around the room.

'How many of these stories are there, Calverly?'

'Twenty.'

'Fine. Short, snappy, and enough of 'em to make a very neat book. By the way, I'm starting a book department in the spring. What do you want for 'em?'

Henry could only look appealingly at his host.

'I'll pay liberally. I tell you frankly I mean to hold you. Make it worth your while. You're going to be my author? Henry Calverly, a Galbraith author. What do you say to a hundred apiece. That's two thousand.'

Henry would have gasped had he not felt utterly spent. He sat motionless, hands limp on his knees, chin down.

'Not enough,' said Merchant.

Henry shifted one hand in ineffectual protest. He was frightened.

'It's pretty near enough. After all, Merchant, it's a case of a new writer. I've got to make him. It'll cost money.'

'True. But I should think——'

'Say a hundred and fifty. That's three thousand. Will you take that, Calverly?'

'What for?' asked Merchant. 'What are you buying exactly?'

'Oh, serial rights. Pay a reasonable royalty on the book, of course. But I've got to publish the book, too. And I

want a long-term contract. Here!' He sat down and figured with a pencil on the edge of the evening paper. 'How about this? I'm to have exclusive control of the Henry Calverly matter for five years——'

'Too long,' said Mr Merchant.

'Well—three years. I'm to see every word before he offers it elsewhere. And for what I accept I'll pay at the same rate per word as for these stories. And books at the same royalty as we agree on for this.'

'Fine for you. Guarantees your control of him. But he gets nothing. No guarantee.'

'What would be right then? I'll do the fair thing. He'll never regret tying up with me.'

'You'd better agree to pay him something—say twenty-five a week—as a minimum, to be charged against serial payments. That is, if you want to tie him up. I'm not sure I'd advise him to do even that, now.'

'I'm going to tie him up, all right. I'll go the limit. Twenty-five a week, minimum, for three years. That's agreed . . . How're you fixed, Calverly? Want any money now?'

Henry looked again at his cool, accomplished host.

'Yes. Better advance a little. He could use it. Couldn't you, Calverly?'

'Why—why——'

'What do you say to five hundred. That'll clinch the bargain. Here—wait!'

He produced a pocket cheque-book and a fountain pen, and wrote out the cheque.

'Here you are, Calverly. That'll take care of you for the present. Mustn't forget to send the stub to Miss Peters to-morrow. You'd better go now. Go home. Get a good night's sleep. And watch that stomach. Cereal's good, at your age. But cut out the orange. . . . I'm going to bed, Merchant. Been travelling hard. Tired out myself. . . . Calverly, I'll send you the contract from New York.'

'First, though'—this from Mr Merchant—'I think you'd better write a letter—here, to-night—confirming the arrangement. You and I can do that. We'll let Mr Calverly go.'

Mr Galbraith didn't say good-night. Henry thought he was about to, and stood up, expectantly; but the little man suddenly dropped his eyes; looked hurriedly about; muttered—'Where'd I lay that fountain pen?'—found it; and rushed off down the hall, trailing the clippings behind him.

Out in the hall, Mr Merchant pulled the door to.

'Calverly,' he said, 'I congratulate you. And I shall congratulate Galbraith.'

Henry looked at him out of wan eyes.

Then suddenly he giggled aloud.

'I know how you feel,' said the older man kindly. 'It is pleasant to succeed.'

'I felt a little bad about—you know, what you said about making him write that letter. He might think I——'

'Don't you worry about that. I'll have the letter for you in the morning. I'm going to pin him right to it. He'll never get out of this.'

'You—you don't mean that he'd—he'd——'

'Oh, he might forget it.'

'Nor after he *promised*!'

'Galbraith's a genius. He gets excited. Over-cerebrates at times. Sometimes he offers young fellows more than he can deliver. Then he wakes up to it and takes a sudden trip to Europe.'

'He acts very strange,' said Henry critically. 'I wonder if all geniuses are that way.'

'They're apt to be queer. But never forget that he's a real one. No matter how mad he may seem to you, no matter how irresponsible, Galbraith is a great editor. He is wild about you. When he said he'd make you, I believe he meant it. And I believe he'll do it. You're on the high road now, Calverly. Through a lucky accident. But that's how most men hit the high road. They happen to be where it is. They stumble on it. Within a year you'll be known everywhere. . . . Well, good-night!'

6

The immediate effect of this experience on Henry was acute depression. Perhaps because his excitement had passed its bearable summit. Though great good fortune always did depress him, even in his later life. It had the effect of suddenly delimiting the boundaries of his widely elastic imagination. It brought him sharply down to the actual.

He hadn't enjoyed the bargaining for him. And the actual Galbraith was a shock from which he didn't recover for years, an utter destruction of cherished illusions.

He walked down to Lake Shore Drive, struggling with these thoughts and with himself. The problem was to get himself able to think at all, about anything. His nerves were bow-strings, his mind a race-track. He was frightened for himself. Over and over he told himself that this amazing adventure was not a dream; that he had seen Galbraith, *the* Galbraith; that he had sold his stories, the work of a few weeks—he recalled how he had written the first ten during three mad days and nights; they had come tumbling out of his brain faster than he could write them down, as if an exuberant angel were dictating to him—had sold them for thousands of dollars; that an income, of a sort, was assured for three years. The stories, even now, seemed an accident. They were a thing that had happened to him. Such a thing might or might not happen again. Though he knew it would. But between times he wasn't a genius; he wasn't anything; just Henry Calverly, of Sunbury. . . . He pushed back his hat; rubbed his blazing forehead; pressed his thumping temples.

'I've got congestion,' he muttered.

He stood at the railing and stared out ever the lake. It was lead black out there, with a tossing light or two; ore freighters or lumber boats headed for Chicago harbour. Beneath him, down the beach, great waves were pounding in, quickly, endlessly, tirelessly, one after the other. He could see the ghostly foam of each. He could feel the spindrift cutting at his face. The wind was so strong he

had to lean against it. A gust tore off his glasses; he let them hang over his shoulder. He welcomed the rush and roar of it in his stormy soul.

After a time, having decided nothing, he hurried across town to the Dexter Smith place.

It was dark, upstairs and down.

He slipped in among the trees; drew near the great house. All the time the little box from Welding's was gripped in his burning hand.

He stood by a large soft maple. He loved the trees of Sunbury; every year he budded, flowered, and died with them. He looked up; the great straight branches were bending before the wind. Leaves were falling about him; the bright yellow leaves of October. He caught at one; missed it. Caught at another. And another.

He laid a hand on the bark; then rested his cheek against it. It was cool to the touch. He stood thus, his arm about the tree, looking up at the dark house. Tears came; blinded him.

'They've shut her up,' he said. 'They're going to take her away. Because she loves me. They're breaking her heart—and mine. Martha'll be back to-morrow. And Mary 'n' her mother. It'll be out then—what—what I did. Everybody'll be talking. I'll have to go away too. I can't live here—not after that.'

A new and fascinating thought came.

'The watchman'll be coming around. Pretty soon, maybe. He'll find me here. I s'pose he'll shoot me. I don't care. Let him. In the morning they'll find my body. And the ring'll be in my pocket. And Mr Galbraith's cheque. And in the morning Mr Merchant'll have that letter. Maybe they'll discover I was some good after all. Maybe they'll be sorry then.'

But on second thought this notion lost something of its appealing quality. He went away; after hours more appeared in the rooms and kept his long-suffering partner awake during much of the night.

At half-past eight the next morning he mounted the front steps of the Smith place and rang the bell. A mildly surprised butler showed him into the spacious parlour.

He waited, fiercely.

A door opened and closed. He heard a heavy step.

Madame Watt entered the room, frowning a little.

'What is it, Henry? Why did you come?'

'I want you to see this,' he said, thrusting the cheque into her hand. Then, before she could more than glance at the figures, he was forcing another paper on her. 'And this!' he cried. 'Please read it!'

She, still frowning, turned the pages.

'But what's all this, Henry?'

'Can't you see? I went around this morning. Mr Merchant had it all ready for me. It's *Galbraith's Magazine*. They're going to print my stories and pay me three thousand. That cheque's for part of it. I get book royalties besides. And twenty-five a week for three years against the price of new work. That's just so I won't write for anybody else. And Mr Galbraith himself promised me he'd make me famous. He's going to advertise me all over the country. Right away. This year. He says there's been nothing like me since Kipling and Stevenson!'

Printed here, coldly, this impassioned outburst may seem to border on absurdity. But shrewd, strong-willed Madame Watt, taking it in, studying him, found it far from absurd. The egotism in it, she perceived, was that of youth as much as of genius. And the blazing eyes, the working face, the emotional uncertainty in the voice, these were to be reckoned with. They were youth—gifted, uncontrolled, very nearly irresistible youth. And as she said, brusquely—'Sit down, Henry!'—and herself dropped heavily into a chair and began deliberately reading the document of the great Galbraith, she knew, in her curiously storm-beaten old heart, that she was sparring for time. Before her, still on his feet, apparently unaware that she had spoken, unaware of everything on earth outside of his own turbulent breast, stood an incarnation of primal energy.

She sighed, as she turned the page. Once she shook her head. She found momentary relief in the thought, so often the only comfort of weary old folk, that youth, at least, never knows its power.

I think he was talking all the time—pouring out an incoherent, tremulous torrent of words. Once or twice she moved her hand as if to brush him away.

When she finally raised her head, he was taking the wrappings from a little box.

'Well, Henry? Just what do you want? Where are we getting, with all this?'

'I want you to let me see Cicely. Just one minute. Let her say. I can't—I *can't*—leave it like this!'

'You promised——'

'That I wouldn't try to see her. But I can come to you can't I? That's fair, isn't it?'

Madame Watt sighed again.

Suddenly Henry leaped forward; caught himself; stepped back; cried out, in a passionately suppressed voice:—

'There she is! Now!'

Cicely was crossing the hall toward the stairs. They could see her through the doorway.

She went up as far as the first landing, a few steps up; then, a hand on the railing, she hesitated and slowly turned her head.

'Will you ask her to come!' Henry moaned. 'Ask her! Let her say! Don't break our hearts like this!'

Madame raised her hand.

Cicely, slowly, pale and gentle of face, came across the wide hall and into the room. She stopped then, hands hanging at her sides, her head bent forward a little, glancing from one to the other.

She looked unexpectedly frail. Henry knew, as his eyes dwelt on her, that she, too, was suffering.

She seemed about to speak; but instead threw out her hands in a little questioning gesture and raised her mobile eyebrows. But she didn't smile.

Henry glanced again at Madame. She was re-reading the Galbraith letter. He waited for her to look up.

Then, all at once, he knew that she meant not to look up. Youth is unerringly keen in its own interest. She was evading the issue. He had beaten her.

He dropped the little box on a chair; stepped forward, ring in hand. He saw Cicely gazing at it, fascinated.

Then his own voice came out—a shy, even polite, if breathless, little voice :—

'I was just wondering, Cicely, if you'd let me give you this ring.'

She lifted very slowly her left hand; still gazing intently at the ring.

He held it out.

Then she said :—

'No, Henry. . . . I mean, hadn't you better wish it on?'

'Oh, yes,' said he. 'Funny! I didn't think of that.'

Madame Watt turned a page, rustling the paper.

'Wait, Henry! Don't let go! Have you wished?'

'Unhuh! Have you?'

'Yes. I wished the first thing.'

'Well—' Henry had to stop. He found himself swallowing rather violently. 'Well—I s'pose I'd better step down to the office. I might come back this afternoon, if—if you'd like me to.'

'Henry,' said Madame now, 'don't be silly! Come to lunch!'

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